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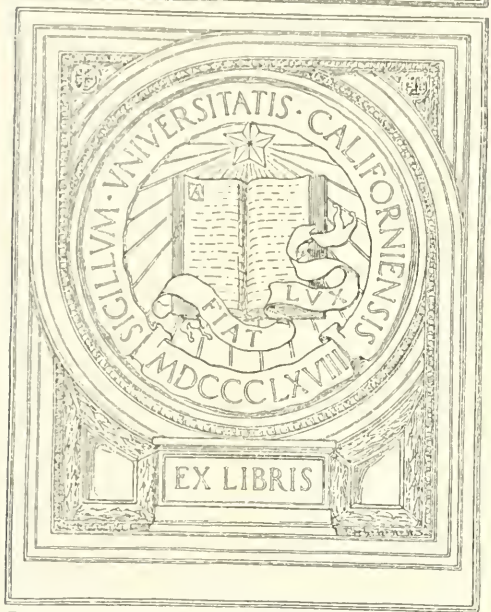

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CAPT'N DAVY'S HONEYMOON

THE LAST CONFESSION

THE BLIND MOTHER

By HALL CAINE

Eighth Thousand

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1892

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To BRAM STOKER

When in dark hours and in evil humours my bad angel has sometimes made me think that friendship as it used to be of old, friendship as we read of it in books, that friendship which is not a jilt sure to desert us, but a brother born to adversity as well as success, is now a lost quality, a forgotten virtue, a high partnership in fate degraded to a low traffic in self-interest, a mere league of pleasure and business, then my good angel for admonition or reproof has whispered the names of a little band of friends, whose friendship is a deep stream that buoys me up and makes no noise; and often first among those names has been your own.

Down to this day our friendship has needed no solder of sweet words to bind it, and I take pleasure in showing by means of this unpretending book that it is founded not only on personal liking and much agreement, but on some wholesome difference and even a little disputation. "The Last Confession" is an attempt to solve a moral problem which we have discussed from opposite poles of sympathy—the absolute value and sanctity of human life, the right to fight, the right to kill, the right to resist evil and to set aside at utmost need

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the letter of the sixth commandment. "The Blind Mother" is a somewhat altered version of an episode in an early romance, and it is presented afresh, with every apology because you with another friend, Theodore Watts, consider it the only worthy part of an unworthy book, and also because it appears to be at all points a companion to the story that goes before it. Of "Capt'n Davy's Honeymoon" I might perhaps say that it is the complement of the other two—all three being stories of great and consuming love, father's, mother's and husband's—but I prefer to confess that I publish it because I know that if any one should smile at my rough Manx comrade, doubting if such a man is in nature and now found among men, I can always answer him and say, "Ah, then, I am richer than you are by one friend at least,—Capt'n Davy without his ruggedness and without his folly, but with his simplicity, his unselfishness and his honour—Bram Stoker!"

H. C.

Hawthorns, Keswick, 1892

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CAPT'N DAVY'S HONEYMOON

CAPT'N DAVY'S HONEYMOON

A COMEDY OF LOVE

I

"My money, ma'am—my money, not me."

"So you say, sir."

"It's my money you've been marrying, ma'am."

"Maybe so, sir."

"Deny it, deny it!"

"Why should I? You say it is so, and so be it."

"Then d—— the money. It took me more till ten years to make it, and middling hard work at that; but you go bail it'll take me less nor ten months to spend it. Ay, or ten weeks, and aisy doing too! And till it's gone, Mistress Quiggin—d'ye hear me—gone, every mortal penny of it gone, pitched into the sea, scattered to smithereens, blown to ould Harry, and dang him—I'll lave ye, ma'am, I'll lave ye though; and, sink or swim, I'll darken your doors no more."

The lady and gentleman who blazed at each other with these burning words, which were pointed, and driven home by flashing eyes and quivering lips, were newly-married husband and wife. They were staying at the old Castle Mona, in Douglas, Isle of Man, and their honeymoon had not yet finished its second quarter. The gentleman was Captain David Quiggin, commonly called Capt'n Davy, a typical Manx sea-dog, thirty years of age; stalwart, stout, shaggy, lusty-lunged, with the tongue of a trooper, the heavy manners of a bear, the stubborn head of a stupid donkey, and the big, soft heart of the baby of a girl. The lady was Ellen Kinvig, known of old to all and sundry as Nelly, Ness, or Nell, but now to everybody concerned as Mistress Capt'n Davy Quiggin, six-and-twenty years of age, tall, comely, as blooming as the gorse; once as free as the air, and as racy of the soil as new-cut peat, but suddenly grown stately, smooth, refined, proud, and reserved. They loved each other to the point of idolatry; and yet they parted ten days after marriage with these words of wroth and madness. Something had come between them. What was it? Another man? No. Another woman? Still no. What then? A ghost, an intangible, almost an invisible but very real and divorce-making co-respondent. They call it Education.

Davy Quiggin was born in a mud house on

the shore, near the old church at Ballaugh The house had one room only, and it had been the living room, sleeping room, birth room, and death room of a family of six. Davy, who was the youngest, saw them all out. The last to go were his mother and his grandfather. They lay ill at the same time, and died on the one day. The old man died first, and Davy fixed up a herring net in front of him, where he lay on the settle by the fire, so that his mother might not see him from her place on the bed.

Not long after that Davy, who was fifteen years of age, went to live as farm lad with Kinvig, of Ballavolley. Kinvig was a solemn person, very stiff and starchy, and sententious in his way, a mighty man among the Methodists, and a power in the pulpit. He thought he had done an act of charity when he took Davy into his home, and Davy repaid him in due time by falling in love with Nelly, his daughter.

When that happened Davy never quite knew. "That's the way of it," he used to say, with the immortal Tom Baynes, "A girl slips in, and there ye are." Nelly was in to a certainty when one night Davy came home late from the club meeting on the street, and rapped at the kitchen window. That was the signal of the home circle that some member of it was waiting at the door. Now there are ways and ways of rapping at a kitchen window. There is the pit-a-pat of a light heart, and the thud-thud of

a heavy one; there is the sharp crack-crack of haste, and the dithering que-we-wee of fear. Davy had a rap of his own, and Nelly knew it. There was a sort of a trip and dance and a rum-tum-tum in Davy's rap that always made Nelly's heart and feet leap up at the same instant. But on this unlucky night it was Nelly's mother who heard it and opened the door. What happened then was like the dismal sneck of the outside gate to Davy for ten years thereafter. The porch was dark, and so was the little square lobby behind the door. On numerous other nights that had been an advantage in Davy's eyes, but on this occasion he thought it a snare of the evil one. Seeing something white in a petticoat he threw his arms about it and kissed and hugged it madly. It struck him at the time as strange that the arms he held did not clout him under the chin, and that the lips he smothered did not catch breath enough to call him a gawbie, and whisper that the old people inside were listening. The truth dawned on him in a moment, and then he felt like a man with an eel crawling down his back, and he wanted nothing else for supper.

It was summer time, and Davy, though a most accomplished sleeper, found no difficulty in wakening himself with the dawn next morning. He was cutting turf in the dubs of the Curragh just then, and he had four hours of this pastime, with spells of sober meditation between, before he came up to the house for breakfast.

Then as he rolled in at the porch, and stamped the water out of his long-legged boots, he saw at a glance that a thunder-cloud was brewing there. Nelly was busy at the long table before the window, laying the bowls of milk and the deep plates for the porridge. Her print frock was as sweet as the may-blossom, her cheeks were nearly as red as the red rose, and like the rose her head hung down. She did not look at him as he entered. Neither did Mrs. Kinvig, who was bending over the pot swung from the hook above the fire, and working the porridge-stick round and round with unwonted energy. But Kinvig himself made up for both of them. The big man was shaving before a looking-glass propped up on the table, against the Pilgrim's Progress and Clark's Commentaries. His left hand held the point of his nose aside between the tip of his thumb and first finger, while the other swept the razor through a hillock of lather and revealed a portion of a mouth twisted three-quarters across his face. But the moment he saw Davy he lowered the razor and looked up with as much dignity as a man could get out of a countenance half covered with soap.

"Come in, sir," said he, with a pretence of great deference. "Mawther," he said, twisting to Mrs. Kinvig, "just wipe down a chair for the gentleman."

Davy slithered into his seat. "I'm in for it," he thought.

"They're telling me," said Kinvig, "that there is a fortune coming at you. Aw, yes, though, and that you're taking notions on a farmer's girl. Respectable man, too—one of the first that's going, with sixty acres at him and more. Amazing thick, they're telling me. Kissing behind the door and the like of that! The capers! It was only yesterday you came to me with nothing on your back but your father's ould trowsis, cut down at the knees."

Nelly slipped out. Her mother made a noise with the porridge pot. Davy was silent. Kinvig walloped his razor on the strop with terrific vigour, then paused, pointed the handle in Davy's direction, tried to curl up his lip into a withering sneer that was half lost in the lather, and said with bitter irony, "My house is too mane for you, sir. You must lave me. It isn't the Isle of Man itself that'll hould the likes of you."

Then Davy found his tongue. "You're right, sir," said he, leaping to his feet, "it's too poor I am for your daughter, is it? Maybe I'll be a piece richer some day, and then you'll be a taste civiller."

"Behold ye now," said Kinvig, "as bould as a goat! Cut your stick—and quick."

"I'm off, sir," said Davy; and then, looking round and remembering that he was being kicked out like a dog and would see Nelly no more, day by day, the devil took hold of him and he began to laugh in Kinvig's ridiculous face.

"Good-bye, ould Sukee," he cried. "I lave you to your texes."

And, turning to where Mrs. Kinvig stood with her back to him, he cried again, "Good-bye, mawther, take care of his ould head—it's swelling so much that his chapel hat is putting corns on it."

That night with his "chiss" of clothes on his shoulders, Davy came downstairs and went out at the porch. There he slipped his burden to the ground, for somebody was waiting to say farewell to him. It was the right petticoat this time, and she was on the right side of the door. The stars were shining overhead, but two that were better than any in the sky were looking into Davy's face, and they were twinkling in tears.

It was only a moment the parting lasted, but a world of love was got into it. Davy had to do penance for the insults he had heaped upon Nelly's father, and in return he got pity for those that had been shovelled upon himself.

"Good-bye, Nell," he whispered; "there's thistles in everybody's crop. But no matter! I'll come back, and then it's married we'll be though. My goodness, yes, and take Ballacry and have six bas'es, and ten pigs, and a pony. But, Nelly, will ye wait for me?"

"D'ye doubt me, Davy?"

"No; but will ye though?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all serene," said Davy, and with

another hug and a kiss, and a lock of brown hair which was cut ready and tied in blue ribbon, he was gone with his chest into the darkness.

Davy sailed in an Irish schooner to the Pacific coast of South America. There he cut his stick again, and got a berth on a coasting-steamer trading between Valparaiso and Callao. The climate was unhealthy, the ports were foul, the Government was uncertain, the dangers were constant, and the hands above him dropped off rapidly. In two years Davy was skipper, and in three years more he was sailing a steamer of his own. Then the money began to tumble into his chest like crushed oats out of a Crown shaft.

The first hundred pounds he had saved he sent home to Dumbell's bank, because he could not trust it out of the Isle of Man. But the hundreds grew to thousands, and the thousands to tens of thousands, and to send all his savings over the sea as he made them began to be slow work, like supping porridge with a pitchfork. He put much of it away in paper rolls at the bottom of his chest in the cabin, and every roll he put by stood to him for something in the Isle of Man. "That's a new cowhouse at Ballavolly." "That's Ballacry." "That's ould Brew's mill at Sulby—he'll be out by this time."

All his dreams were of coming home, and sometimes he wrote letters to Nelly. The writing in them was uncertain, and the spelling

was doubtful, but the love was safe enough. And when he had poured out his heart in small "i's" and capital "U's"? he always inquired how more material things were faring. "How's the herrings this sayson; and did the men do well with the mack'rel at Kinsale; and is the cowhouse new thatched, and how's the chapel going? And is the ould man still playing hang with the texes?"

Kinvig heard of Davy's prosperity, and received the news at first in silence, then with satisfaction, and at length with noisy pride. His boy was a bould fellow. "None o' yer rancy-tancy-tissimee-tea tied to the old mawther's apron-strings about *him*. He's coming home rich, and he'll buy half the island over, and make a donation of a harmonia to the chapel, and kick ould Cowley and his fiddle out."

Awaiting that event, Kinvig sent Nelly to England, to be educated according to the station she was about to fill. Nelly was four years in Liverpool, but she had as many breaks for visits home. The first time she came she minced her words affectedly, and Kinvig whispered the mother that she was getting "a fine English tongue at her." The second time she came she plagued everybody out of all peace by correcting their "plaze" to "please," and their "mate" to "meat," and their "lave" to "leave." The third time she came she was silent, and looked ashamed; and the fourth time it was to meet

her sweetheart on his return home after ten years' absence.

Davy came by the *Snaefell* from Liverpool. It was August—the height of the visiting season—and the deck of the steamer was full of tourists. Davy walked through the cobweb of feet and outstretched legs with the face of a man who thought he ought to speak to everybody. Fifty times in the first three hours he went forward to peer through the wind and the glaring sunshine for the first glimpse of the Isle of Man. When at length he saw it, like a grey bird lying on the waters far away, with the sun's light tipping the hill-tops like a feathery crest, he felt so thick about the throat that he took six steerage passengers to the bar below the bridge to help him to get rid of his hoarseness. There was a brass band aboard, and during the trip they played all the outlandish airs of Germany, but just as the pacquet steamed into Douglas Bay, and Davy was watching the land and remembering everything upon it, and shouting "That's Castle Mona!" "There's Fort Ann!" "Yonder's ould St. Mathews's!" they struck up "Home, Sweet Home." That was too much for Davy. He dived into his breeches' pockets, gave every German of the troupe five shillings apiece, and then sat down on a coil of rope and blubbered aloud like a baby.

Kinvig had sent a grand landau from Ramsey to fetch Capt'n Davy to Ballaugh; but before the English driver from the Mitre

had identified his fare Davy had recognised an old crony, with a high, springless country cart—Billiam Ballaneddan, who had come to Douglas to despatch a barrel of salted herrings to his married daughter at Liverpool, and was going back immediately. So Davy tumbled his boxes and bags and other belongings into the landau, piling them mountains high on the cushioned seats, and clambered into the cart himself. Then they set off at a race which should be home first—the cart or the carriage, the luggage or the owner of it; the English driver on his box seat with his tall hat and starchy cravat, or Billiam twidding his rope reins, and Davy on the plank seat beside him, bobbing and bumping, and rattling over the stones like a parched pea on a frying-pan.

That was a tremendous drive for Davy. He shouted when he recognised anything, and as he recognised everything he shouted throughout the drive. They took the road by old Braddan Church and Union Mills, past St. John's, under the Tynwald Hill, and down Creg Willie's Hill. As he approached Kirk Michael his excitement was intense. He was nearing home and he began to know the people. "Lord save us, there's Tommy Billbeg—how do, Tommy? And there's ould Betty! My gough, she's in yet—how do, mawther! There's little Juan Caine growed up to a man! How do, Johnny, and how's the girls and how's the ould man, and how's your-

self? Goodness me, here's Liza Corlett, and a baby at her! I knew her when she was no more than a babby herself." This last remark to the English driver who was coming up sedately with his landau at the tail of the springless cart.

"Drive on, Billiam! Come up, ould girl—just a taste of the whip, Billiam! Do her no harm at all. Bishop's Court! Deary me, the ould house is in the same place still."

At length the square tower of Ballaugh Church was seen above the trees with the last rays of the setting sun on its topmost storey, and then Davy's eagerness swept down all his patience. He jumped up in the cart at the peril of being flung out, took off his billycock, whirled it round his head, and bellowed "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" After that he would have leapt alongside to the ground and run. "Hould hard!" he cried, "I'll bate the best mare that's going." But Billiam pinned him down to the seat with one hand while he whipped up the horse to a gallop with the other.

They arrived at Ballavolley an hour and a half before they were expected. Mistress Kinvig was washing dishes in a tub on the kitchen-table. Kinvig himself was sitting lame with rheumatism in the "elber cheer" by the ingle. They wiped down a chair for Davy this time.

"And Nelly," said Davy. "Where's Nelly?"

"She's coming, Capt'n," said Kinvig. "Nelly!" he called up the kitchen stairs, with a knowing wink at Davy, "Here's a gentleman asking after you."

Davy was dying of impatience. Would she be the same dear old Nell?

"Nell—Nelly," he shouted, "I've kep' my word though."

"Aw, give her time, Capt'n," said Kinvig; "a new frock isn't rigged up in no time, not to spake of a silk handkercher going pinning round your throat."

But Davy, who had waited ten years, would not wait a minute longer, and he was making for the stairs with the purpose of invading Nelly's bedroom, when the lady herself came sweeping down on tiptoes. Davy saw her coming in a cloud of silk, and at the next moment the slippery stuff was crumbling, and whisking, and creaking under his hands, for his arms were full of it.

"Aw, mawther," said he. "They're like honeysuckles—don't spake to me for a week. Many's the time I've been lying in my bunk a-twigging the rats squeaking and coorting overhead, and thinking to myself, Kisses is skess with you now, Davy."

The wedding came off in a week. Parson Kennish officiated, and he was the only man in the parish who had not gone down like a flood before the tide of Davy's fortune. In the vestry Davy took up his pen to sign

his name, and the signature was clumsy and indefinite. Seeing his opportunity of humiliating the hero, the parson cocked his eye at it and said, "What's this? Hieroglyphics? Tut! There—make your cross after *that*." And signing the name afresh, in a rapid scrawl like a shower of rain, he offered the pen back to Davy. The great fellow blushed down to his collar, tried to laugh, took the pen and made his mark.

"Hould hard though, parson," chuckled old Kinvig on his two sticks, "it's herself will be making it up for the pair of them."

Then Nelly took the pen in her turn, and to everybody's surprise she made a cross underneath the cross made by Davy.

"Chut! What's that, woman?" said Kinvig. "And you writing a hand like the parson hisself!"

"Hush," whispered Nelly. "Did you think I was going to shame him?"

There were terrific rejoicings. The party returned from church in the landau that brought up Davy's luggage. At the bridge six strapping fellows, headed by the blacksmith, and surrounded by a troop of women and children, stretched a rope across the road, and would not let the horses pass until the bridegroom had paid the toll. Davy had prepared himself in advance with two pounds in sixpenny bits, which made his trowsers pockets stand out like a couple of cannon balls. He fired

those balls, and they broke in the air like shells.

At the wedding-breakfast in the barn at Ballavolly Davy made a speech. It was a sermon to young fellows on the subject of sweethearts. "Don't you marry for land," said he, "It's muck," said he. "What d'ye say, Billiam—you'd like more of it? I wouldn't trust; but it's spaking the truth I am for all. Maybe you think about some dirty ould trouss: 'She's a warm girl, she's got nice things at her—bas'es and pigs, and the like of that.' But don't, if you're not a reg'lar blundering blockit." Then, looking down at the top of Nelly's head, where she sat with her eyes in her lap beside him, he softened down to sentiment, and said, "Marry for love, boys; stick to the girl that's good, and then go where you will she'll be the star above that you'll sail your barque by, and if you stay at home (and there's no place like it) her parting kiss at midnight will be helping you through your work all next day."

The parting kiss at midnight brought Davy's oration to a close, for a tug at his coat-tails on Nelly's side fetched him suddenly to his seat.

Two hours afterwards the landau was rolling away towards the Castle Mona Hotel at Douglas, where, by Nelly's arrangement, Capt'n Davy and his bride were to spend their honeymoon.

II

Now it so befell that on the very day when Capt'n Davy and Mrs. Quiggin quarrelled and separated, two of their friends were by their urgent invitation crossing from England to visit them. Davy's friend was Jonathan Lovibond, an Englishman, whose acquaintance he had made on the Pacific coast. Mrs. Quiggin's was Jenny Crow, a young lady of lively manners, whom she had annexed during her four years' residence at Liverpool. These two had been lovers five years before, had quarrelled and parted on the eve of the time appointed for their marriage, and had not since set eyes on each other. They met for the first time afterwards on the steamer that was taking them to the Isle of Man, and neither knew the destination of the other.

Miss Crow looked out of her twinkling eyes and saw, promenading on the quarter-deck before her, a gentleman whom she must have thought she had somewhere seen before, but that his gigantic black moustache was a puzzle, and the little imperial on his chin was a baffling difficulty. Mr. Lovibond puffed the smoke

from a colossal cigar, and wondered if the world held two pair of eyes like those big black ones which glanced up at him sometimes from a deck stool, a puffy pile of wool, two long crochet needles, and a couple of white hands, from which there flashed a diamond ring that he somehow thought he knew.

These mutual meditations lasted two long hours, and then a runaway ball of the wool from the lap of the lady on the deck stool was hotly pursued by the gentleman with the moustache, and instantly all uncertainty was at an end. After exclamations of surprise at the strange recognition (it was "all so sudden"), the two old friends came to closer quarters. They touched gingerly on the past, had some tender passages of delicate fencing, gave various sly hits and digs, threw out certain subtle hints, and came to a mutual and satisfactory understanding. Neither had ever looked at anybody else since their rupture, and therefore both were still unmarried.

Having reached this stage of investigation, the wool and its needles were stowed away in a basket under the chair, in order that the lady might accept the invitation of the gentleman to walk with him on the deck; and as the wind had freshened by this time, and walking in skirts was like tacking in a stiff breeze, the gentleman offered his arm to the lady, and thus they sailed forth together.

"And with whom are you to stay when

we reach the island, Miss Crow?" said Lovibond.

"With a young Manx friend lately married," said Jenny.

"That's strange; for I am going to do the same," said Lovibond. "Where?"

"At Castle Mona," said Jenny.

"That's stranger still; for it's the place to which I am going," said Lovibond. "What's your Manx friend's name?"

"Mrs. Quiggin, now," said Jenny.

"That's strangest of all," said Lovibond; "for my friend is Captain Quiggin, and we are bound for the same place, on the same errand."

This series of coincidences thawed down the remaining frost between the pair, and they exchanged mutual confidences. They had gone so far as to promise themselves a fortnight's further enjoyment of each other's society, when their arrival at Douglas put a sudden end to their anticipations.

Two carriages were waiting for them on the pier—one, with a maid inside, was to take Jenny to Castle Mona: the other, with a boy, was to take Lovibond to Fort Ann.

The maid was Peggy Quine, seventeen years of age, of dark complexion, nearly as round as a dolley-tub, and of deadly earnest temperament. When Jenny found herself face to face and alone with this person, she lost no time in asking how it came to pass that Mrs. Quiggin

was at Castle Mona while her husband was at Fort Ann.

"They've parted, ma'am," said Peggy.

"Parted?" shrieked Jenny above the rattle of the carriage glass.

"Ah, yes, ma'am," Peggy stammered; "cruel, ma'am, right cruel, cruel extraordinary. It's a wonder the capt'n doesn't think shame of his conduck. The poor misthress! She's clane heartbroken. It's a mercy to me she didn't clout him."

In two minutes more Jenny was in Mrs. Quiggin's room at Castle Mona, crying, "Gracious me, Ellen, what is this your maid tells me?"

Nelly had been eating out her heart in silence all day long, and now the flood of her pride and wrath burst out, and she poured her wrongs upon Jenny as fiercely as if that lady stood for the transgressions of her husband.

"He reproached me with my poverty," she cried.

"What?"

"Well, he told me I had only married him for his money—there's not much difference."

"And what did you say?" said Jenny.

"Say? What could I say? What would any woman say who had any respect for herself?"

"But how did he come to accuse you of marrying him for his money? Had you asked him for any?"

"Not I, indeed."

"Perhaps you hadn't loved him enough?"

"Not that either—that I know of."

"Then why did he say it?"

"Just because I wanted him to respect himself, and have some respect for his wife, too, and behave as a gentleman, and not as a raw Manx rabbit from the Calf."

Jenny gave a look of amused intelligence, and said, "Oh, oh, I see, I see! Well, let me take off my bonnet, at all events."

While this was being done in the bedroom, Nelly, who was furtively wiping her eyes, continued the recital of her wrongs:

"Would you believe it, Jenny, the first thing he did when we arrived here after the wedding was to shake hands with the hall porter and the boots who took our luggage, and ask after their sisters and their mothers, and their sweethearts—the man knew them all. And when he heard from his boy, Willie Quarrie, that the cook was a person from Michael, it was as much as I could do to keep him from tearing down to the kitchen to talk about old times."

"Yes, I see," said Jenny; "he has made a fortune, but he is just the same simple Manx lad that he was ten years ago."

"Just, just! We can't go out for a walk together but he shouts, 'How do! Fine day, mates!' to the drivers of the hackney cabs across the promenade; and the joy of his life is to get up at seven in the morning and go down

to the quay before breakfast to keep tally with a chalk for the fishermen counting their herrings out of the boats into the barrels."

"Not a bit changed, then, since he went away?" said Jenny, before the glass.

"Not a bit; and because I asked him to know his place, and if he is a gentleman to behave as a gentleman and speak as a gentleman, and not make so easy with such as don't respect him any the better for it, he turns on me and tells me I've only married him for his money."

"Dreadful!" said Jenny, fixing her fringe. "And is this the old sweetheart you have waited ten years for?"

"Indeed, it is."

"And now that he has come back and you've married him, he has parted from you in ten days?"

"Yes; and it will be the talk of the island—indeed it will."

"Shocking! And so he has left you here on your honeymoon without a penny to bless yourself?"

"Oh, for the matter of that, he fixed something on me before the wedding—a jointure, the advocates called it."

"Terrible! Let me see. He's the one who sent you presents from America?"

"Oh; he piled presents enough on me. It's the way of the men: the stingiest will do that. They like to think they're such generous creatures. But let a poor woman count on it, and

she'll soon be wakened from her dream. 'You married me for my money—deny it!'"

"Fearful!"

Jenny was leaning her forehead against the window sash, and looking vacantly out on the bay. Nelly observed her a moment, stopped suddenly in the tale of her troubles, and said, in another voice, "Jenny Crow, I believe you are laughing at me. It's always the way with you. You can take nothing seriously."

Jenny turned back to the room with a solemn face, and said, "Nelly, if you waited ten years for your husband, I suppose that he waited ten years for you?"

"I suppose he did."

"And, if he is the same man as he was when he went away, I suppose his love is the same?"

"Then how *could* he say such things?"

"And if he is the same, and his love is the same, isn't it possible that somebody else is different?"

"Now, Jenny Crow, you are going to say it's all my fault?"

"Not all, Nelly. Something has come between you."

"It's the money. Oh, Jenny, if you ever marry, marry a poor man, and then he can't fling it in your face that you are poorer than he."

"No; it can't be the money, Nelly, for the money is his, and yet it hasn't changed him.

And, Nelly, isn't it a good thing in a rich man not to turn his back on his old poor comrades—not to think because he has been in the sun that people are black who are only in the shade—not to pretend to have altered his skin because his coat has changed—isn't it?"

"I see what you mean. You mean that I've driven my husband away with my bad temper."

"No; not that; but Nelly—dear old Nell—think what you're doing. Take warning from one who once made shipwreck of her own life. Think no man common who loves you—no matter what his ways are, or his manners, or his speech. Love makes the true nobility. It ennobles him who loves you and you who are beloved. Cling to it—prize it—do not throw it away. Money cannot buy it, nor fame nor rank atone for it. When a woman is loved she is a queen, and he who loves her is her king."

Mrs. Quiggin was weeping behind her hands by this time, but she lifted swollen eyes to say, "I see: you would have me go to him and submit, and explain, and beg his pardon. 'Dear David, I didn't marry you for your money——' No," leaping to her feet, "I'll scrub my fingers to the bone first."

"But, Nelly——"

"Say no more, Jenny Crow. We're hot-headed people, both of us, and we'll quarrel."

Then Jenny's solemn manner was gone in an

instant. She snapped her fingers, kicked up one leg a little, and said lightly, "Very well; and now let us have some dinner."

Meantime Lovibond was hearing the other side of the story from Captain Davy at Fort Ann. On the way there he had learned of the separation from the boy, Willie Quarrie, a lugubrious Manx lad, eighteen years old, with a face as white as a haddock and as grim as a gannet.

"Aw, terr'ble doings, sir, terr'ble, terr'ble!" moaned Willie. "Young Mistress Quiggin ateing her heart out at Castle Mona, and Capt'n Davy hisself at Fort Ann over, drinking and tearing and carrying on till all's blue."

Lovibond found Captain Davy in the smoke-room with a face as hard as a frozen turnip, one leg over the arm of an elbow-chair, a church-warden pipe in his mouth, a gigantic glass of brandy and soda before him, and an admiring circle of the laziest riff-raff of the town about him. As soon as they were alone he said,

"But what's this that your boy tells me, captain?"

"I'm foundered," said Davy, "broke, wrecked, the screw of my tide's gone twisting on the rocks. I'm done, mate, I'm done."

Then he proceeded to recite the incidents of the quarrel, colouring them by the light of the numerous glasses with which he had covered his brain since morning.

"'You've married me for my money,' says I. 'What else?' said she. 'Then d—— the money,' says I, 'I'll lave you till it's gone.' 'Do it and welcome,' says she, and I'm doing it, bad cess to it, I'm doing it. But stop this jaw. I swore to myself I wouldn't spake of it to any man living. What d'ye drink? I've took to the brandy swig myself. Join in. Mate!" (this in a voice of thunder to the waiter at the end of the adjoining room) "brandy for the gentleman."

Lovibond waited for a moment and then said quietly, "But whatever made you give her an ungenerous stab like that, captain?"

Davy looked up curiously and answered, "That's just what I've tooken six big drinks to find out. But no use at all, and what's left to do?"

"Why take it back," said Lovibond.

"No, deng my buttons if I will."

"Why not?"

"'Cause it's true."

Lovibond waited again, and then said in another voice, "And is this the little girl you used to tell of out yonder on the coast—Nessy, Nelly, Nell, what was it?"

Davy's eyes began to fill, but his mouth remained firm. He cleared his throat noisily, shook the dust out of his pipe on to the heel of his boot, and said, "No—yes—no—Well, it is and it isn't. It's Nelly Kinvig, that's sarten sure. But the juice of the woman's sowl's dried up."

"The little thing that used to know your rap at the kitchen window, and come tripping out like a bird chirping in the night, and go linking down the lane with you in the starlight?"

Davy broke the shaft of his churchwarden into small lengths, and flung the pieces out at the open window and said, "I darn't say no."

"The one that stuck to you like wax when her father gave you the great bounce out—eh?"

Davy wriggled and spat, and then muttered, "You go bail."

"You have known her since you were children, haven't you?"

Davy's hard face thawed suddenly, and he said, "Ay, since she wore petticoats up to her knees, and I was a boy in a jacket, and we played hop-scotch in the haggard, and double-my-duck agen the cow-house gable. Aw dear, aw dear! The sweet little thing she was then any way. Yellow hair at her, and eyes like the sea, and a voice same as the throstle! Well, well, to think, to think! Playing in the gorse and the ling together, and the daisies and the buttercups—and then the curlews whistling and the river singing like music, and the bees ahumming—aw, terr'ble sweet and nice. And me going barefooted, and her bare-legged, and divil a hat at the one of us—aw, deary me, deary me! Wasn't much starch at her in them ould days, mate."

"Is there now, captain?"

"Now? D'ye say *now*? My goodness! It's always hemming and humming and a heise of the neck, and her head up like a Cochen-China with a top-knot, and 'How d'ye do?' and cetererar and cetererar. Aw, smooth as an ould threepenny bit—smooth astonishing. And partic'lar! My gough! You couldn't call Tom to a cat afore her, but she'd be agate of you to make it Thomas."

Lovibond smiled behind his big moustache.

"The rael ould Manx isn't good enough for her now. Well, I wasn't objecting, not me. She's got the English tongue at her—that's all right. Only I'll stick to what I'm used of. Job's patience went at last and so did mine, and I aren't much of a Job neither."

"And what has made all this difference?" said Lovibond.

"Why, the money, of course. It was the money that done it, bad cess to it," said Davy, pitching the head of his pipe after the shank. "I went out yonder to get it and I got it. Middling hard work, too, but no matter. It was to be all for her. 'I'll come back, Nelly,' says I, 'and we'll take Ballacry and have six craythurs and a pony, and keep a girl to do for you, and you'll take your aise—only milking maybe, or churning, but nothing to do no harm.' I was ten years getting it, and I never took notions on no other girls neither. No, honour bright, thinks I, Nelly's waiting for you, Davy! Always draeming of her, 'cept when the lazy

black chaps wanted leathering, and that's a job that isn't nothing without a bit of swearing at whiles. But at night, aw, at night, mate, lying out on the deck in that heat like the miller's kiln, and shelling your clothes piece by piece same as a bushel of oats, and looking up at the stars a-twinkling in the sky, and spotting one of them, and saying to yourself quiet-like, so as them niggers won't hear, 'That star is a-twinkling over Nelly, too, and maybe she's watching it now.' It seemed as if we wasn't so far apart then. Somehow it made the world a taste smaller. 'Shine on, my beauty,' thinks I, 'shine down straight into Nelly's room, and if she's awake tell her I'm coming, and if she's asleep just make her draem that I'm loving nobody else till her.' But, chut! It was myself that was draeming. Drink up! She married me for my money, so I'm making it fly."

"And when it's gone—what then?" said Lovibond. "Will you go back to her?"

"Maybe so, maybe no."

"Will anything be the better because the money's spent?"

"God knows."

"Will she be as sweet and good as she once was when you are as poor as you were?"

Davy heaved up to his feet. "What's the use of thinking of the like of that?" he cried. "My money's mine. I baked for it out in that oven. Now I'm spending it, and what for shouldn't I? Here goes—healths apiece!"

Next day Lovibond and Jenny Crow met on the pier. There they pondered the ticklish situation of their friends, and every word they said on it was pointed and punctuated by a sense of their own relations.

"It's plain that the good fools love each other," said Jenny.

"Quite plain," said Lovibond.

"Heigho! It's mad work being angry with somebody you are dying to love," said Jenny.

"Colney Hatch is nothing to it," said Lovibond.

"Smaller things have parted people for years," said Jenny.

"Yes; five years," said Lovibond.

"The longer apart the wider the breach, and the harder to cover it," said Jenny.

"Just so," said Lovibond.

"They must meet. Of course they'll fight like cat and dog, but better that than this separation. Time leaves bigger scars than claws ever made. Now, couldn't we bring them together?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Lovibond.

"I'm sure he must be a dear simple soul, though I've never set eyes on him," said Jenny.

"And I'm certain she must be as sweet as an angel, though I've never seen her," said Lovibond.

Jenny shot a jealous glance at her companion, then cracked two fingers and said eagerly, "There you are—there's the idea in a cockle-

shell. Now *if each could see the other through other's eyes!*"

"The very thing!" said Lovibond. "'O, wad some power the giftie gie us'—eh?"

"Then why don't you give me your arm at once, and let me think it over?" said Jenny. In less than an hour these two wise heads had devised a scheme to bring Capt'n Davy and his bride together. What that scheme was and how it worked let those who read discover.

III

Six days passed as with feet of lead, and Capt'n Davy and Mrs. Quiggin were still in Douglas. They could not tear themselves away. Morning and night the good souls were seized by a morbid curiosity about their servants' sweethearts. "Seen Peggy to-day?" Capt'n Davy would say. "I suppose you've not come across Willie Quarrie lately?" Mrs. Quiggin would ask. Thus did they squeeze to the driest pulp every opportunity of hearing anything of each other.

Jenny Crow, with Mrs. Quiggin at Castle Mona, had not yet set eyes on Captain Davy, and Lovibond, with Captain Davy at Fort Ann, had never once seen Mrs. Quiggin. Jenny had said nothing of Lovibond to Nelly, and Lovibond had said nothing of Jenny to Davy.

Matters stood so when one evening Peggy Quine was dressing up her mistress's hair for dinner, and answering the usual question.

"Seen Willie Quarrie, ma'am? Aw 'deed, yes, ma'am; and it's shocking the stories he's telling me. The Capt'n's making the money fly. Bowls and beer, and cards and betting—it's terr'ble, ma'am, terr'ble. Somebod should

hould him. He's distracted like. Giving to everybody as free as free. Parsons and preachers and the like—they're all at him, same as flies at a sheep with the rot."

"And what do people say, Peggy?"

"They say fools and their money is quickly parted, ma'am."

"How dare you call anybody a fool, Peggy?"

"Aw it's not me, ma'am. It's them that's seeing him wasting his money like water through a pitchfork. And the dirts that's catching most is shouting loudest. 'Deed, ma'am, but his conduck is shocking."

"And what do people say is the cause of it, Peggy?"

"Lumps in his porridge, ma'am."

"What?"

"Yes, though, that's what Willie Quarrie is telling me. When a woman isn't just running even with her husband they call her lumps in his porridge. Aw, Willie's a feeling lad."

There was a pause after this disclosure, and then Mrs. Quiggin said in another voice, "Peggy, there's a strange gentleman staying with the Captain at Fort Ann, is there not?"

"Yes, ma'am; Mr. Loviboy."

"What is he like, Peggy?"

"Pepper and salt trowis, ma'am, and a morsel of hair on the tip of his chin."

"Tall, Peggy?"

"No, a long wisp'ry man."

"I suppose he helps the Captain to spend his money?"

"Never a ha'po'th, ma'am, 'deed no; but terr'ble onaisy at it, and rigging him constant. But no use at all, at all. The Cap'n's intarmined to ruin hisself. Somebody should just take him and wallop him, ding dong, afore he's wasted all he's got, and hasn't a penny left at him."

"How dare you, Peggy?"

Peggy was dismissed in anger, and Mrs. Quiggin sat down to write a letter to Lovibond. She begged him to pardon the liberty of one who was no stranger, though they had never met, in asking him to come to her without delay. This done, and marked *private*, she called Peggy back and bade her to take the letter to Willie Quarrie, and tell him to give it to the gentleman before the Captain came down to breakfast in the morning.

The day was Sunday, the weather was brilliant, the window was open, and the salt breath of the sea was floating into the room. With the rustle of silk like a breeze in a pine tree Jenny Crow came back from a walk, swinging a parasol by a ring about her wrist.

"Such an adventure!" she said, sinking into a chair. "A man, of course! I saw him first on the Head at the skirts of the crowd that was listening to the Bishop's preaching. Such a manly fellow! Broad-shouldered, big-chested, standing square on his legs like a rock. Dark,

of course, and such eyes, Nelly! Brown—no, black-brown. I like black-brown eyes in a man, don't you?"

Captain Davy's eyes were of the darkest brown; Mrs. Quiggin gave no sign.

"Then his dress—so simple. None of your cuffs and ruffs, and great high collars like a cart going for coke. Just a blue serge suit, and a monkey jacket. I like a man in a monkey jacket."

Captain Davy wore a monkey jacket; Mrs. Quiggin coloured slightly.

"A sailor, thinks I. There's something so free and open about a sailor, isn't there?"

"Do you think so, Jenny?" said Mrs. Quiggin in a faint voice.

"I'm sure of it, Nelly. The sailor is just like the sea. He's noisy—so is the sea. Liable to storms—so is the sea. Blusters and boils, and rocks and reels—so does the sea. But he's sunny too, and open and free, and healthy and bracing, and the sea is all that as well."

Mrs. Quiggin was thinking of Captain Davy, and tingling with pleasure and shame, but she only said, falteringly, "Didn't you talk of some adventure?"

"Oh, of course, certainly," said Jenny. "After he had listened a moment he went on, and I lost sight of him. Presently I went on, too, and walked across the Head until I came within sight of Port Soderick. Then I sat down by a great boulder. So quiet up there, Nelly; not

a sound except the squeal of the sea-birds, the boo-oo of the big waves outside, and the plash-ash of the little ones on the beach below. All at once I heard a sigh. At that I looked to the other side of the boulder, and there was my friend of the monkey jacket. I was going to rise, but he rose instead, and begged me not to trouble. Then I was vexed with myself, and said I hoped he wouldn't disturb himself on my account."

"You never said that, Jenny Crow?"

"Why not, my dear? You wouldn't have had me less courteous than he was. So he stood and talked. You never heard such a voice, Nelly. Deep as a bell, and his Manx tongue was like music. Talk of the Irish brogue! There's no brogue in the world like the Manx—is there now, not if the right man is speaking it?"

"So he was a Manxman," said Mrs. Quiggin, with a far-away look through the open window.

"Didn't I say so before? But he has quite saddened me. I'm sure there's trouble hanging over him. 'I've been sailing foreign, ma'am,' said he, 'and I don't know nothing——'"

"Oh, then he wasn't a gentleman?" said Mrs. Quiggin.

Jenny fired up sharply. "Depends on what you call a gentleman, my dear. Now, any man is a gentleman to me who can afford to dispense with the first two syllables of the name."

Mrs. Quiggin looked down at her feet. "I only mean," she said meekly, "that your friend hasn't as much education——"

"Then, perhaps, he has more brains," said Jenny. "That's the way they're sometimes divided, you know, and education isn't everything."

"Do *you* think that, Jenny?" said Mrs. Quiggin, with another long look through the window."

"Of course I do," said Jenny.

"And what did he say?"

"'I've been sailing foreign, ma'am,' he said, 'and I don't know nothing that cuts a man's heart from its moorings like coming home same as a homing pigeon, and then wishing yourself back again same as a lost one.'"

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Quiggin. "He must have found things changed since he went away."

"He must," said Jenny.

"Perhaps he has lost some one who was dear to him," said Mrs. Quiggin.

"Perhaps," said Jenny, with a sigh.

"His mother may be, or his sister——" began Mrs. Quiggin.

"Yes, or his wife," continued Jenny, with a moan.

Mrs. Quiggin drew up suddenly. "What's his name?" she asked sharply.

"Nay, how could I ask him that?" said Jenny.

"Where does he live?" said Mrs. Quiggin.

"Or that either?" said Jenny.

Mrs. Quiggin's eyes wandered slowly back to the window. "We've all got our troubles, Jenny," she said quietly.

"All," said Jenny. "I wonder if I shall ever see him again."

"Tell me if you do, Jenny?" said Mrs. Quiggin.

"I will, Nelly," said Jenny.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow," said Mrs. Quiggin.

As Jenny rose to remove her bonnet she shot a sly glance out of the corners of her eyes, and saw that Mrs. Quiggin was furtively wiping her own.

Meanwhile Lovibond at Fort Ann was telling a similar story to Captain Davy. He had left the house for a walk before Davy had come down to breakfast, and on returning at noon he found him immersed in the usual occupation of his mornings. This was that of reading and replying to his correspondence. Davy read with difficulty, and replied to all letters by cheque. His method of business was peculiar and original. He was stretched on the sofa with a pipe in his mouth, and the morning's letters pigeon-holed between his legs. Willie Quarrie sat at a table with a cheque-book before him. While Davy read the letters one by one he instructed Willie as to the nature of

the answer, and Willie with his head aslant, his mouth awry, and his tongue in his cheek, turned it into figures on the cheque-book.

As Lovibond came in Davy was knocking off the last batch for the day. "'Respected sir,' he was reading, 'I know you've a tender heart' . . . . Send her five pounds, Willie, and tell her to take that talk to the butcher's. 'Honoured Captain, we are going to erect a new school in connection with Ballajora chapel, and if you will honour us by laying the foundation stone. . . .' Never laid a stone in my life 'cept one, and that was my mawther's sink-stone. Twenty pounds, Willie. 'Sir, we are to hold a bazaar, and if you will consent to open it. . . .' Bazaar! I know: a sort of ould clothes shop in a chapel where you're never tooken up for cheating, because you always says your paternosterings afore you begin. Ten pounds, Willie. Helloa, here's Parson Quiggin. Wish the ould devil would write more simpler; I was never no good at the big spells myself. 'Dear David. . . .' That's good—he walloped me out of the school once for mimicking his walk —same as a cockatoo esactly. 'Dear David, owing to the la-mentable death of brother Mylechreest it has been re-solved to ask you to become a member of our com-mittee. . . .' Committee! I know the sort—kind of religious firm where there's three partners, only two of them's sleeping ones. Dirty ould hypocrite! Fifteen pounds, Willie."

This was the scene that Lovibond interrupted by his entrance. "Still bent on spending your money, Captain?" he said. "Don't you see that the people who write you these begging letters are impostors?"

"Coorse I do," said Davy. "What's it saying in the Ould Book? 'Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' Only, as Parson Howard used to say (bless the ould angel!) 'Summat's gone scew with the translation theer, friends — should have been vultures."

"Half of them will only drink your money, Captain," said Lovibond.

"And what for shouldn't they? That's what I'm doing," said Davy.

"It's poor work, Captain, poor work. You didn't always think money was a thing to pitch into a ditch."

"Always? My goodness, no!" said Davy. "Time was once when I thought money was just all and Tommy in this world. My gough, yes, when I was a slip of a lad, didn't I?" said he, sobering very suddenly. "The father was lost in a gale at the herrings, and the mawther had to fend for the lot of us. They all went off except myself—the sisters and brothers. Poor things, they wasn't willing to stay with us, and no wonder. But there's mostly an ould person about every Manx house that sees the young ones out, and the mawther's father was at us still. Lame though of his legs with the

rheumatis, and wake in his intellecs for all. Couldn't do nothing but lie in by the fire with his bit of a blanket hanging over his head, same as snow atop of a hawthorn bush. Just stirring the peats, and boiling the kettle, and lifting the gorse when there was any fire. The mawther weeded for Jarvis Kewley—sixpence a day dry days, and fourpence all weathers. Middling hard do's, mate. And when she'd give the ould man his basin of broth he'd be saying, squeaky-like, 'Give it to the boy, woman; he's a growing lad?' 'Chut! take it, man,' the mawther would say, and then he'd be whimpering, 'I m keeping you long, Liza, I'm keeping you long.' And there was herself making a noise with her spoon in the bottom of a basin, and there was me grinding my teeth, and swearing to myself like mad, 'As sure as the living God I'll be ruch some day.' And now——"

Davy snapped his fingers, laughed boisterously, rolled to his feet, and said shortly, "Where've you been to?"

"To church—the church with a spire at the end of the parade," said Lovibond.

"St. Thomas's—I know it," said Davy.

St. Thomas's was half-way up to Castle Mona.

The men strolled out at the window, which opened on to the warm, soft turf of the Head, and lay down there with their faces to the sun-lit bay.

"Who preached?" said Davy, clasping hands at the back of his head.

"A young woman," said Lovibond.

Davy lifted his head out of its socket. "My goodness!" he said.

"Well, at all events," explained Lovibond, "it was a girl who preached to *me*. The moment I went into the church I saw her, and I saw nothing else until I came out again."

Davy laughed. "Ay, that's the way a girl slips in," said he. "Who was she?"

"Nay; *I* don't know," said Lovibond; "but she sat over against me on the opposite side of the aisle, and her face was the only prayer-book I could keep my eyes from wandering from."

"And what was her tex', mate?"

"Beauty, grace, truth, the tenderness of a true heart, the sweetness of a soul that is fresh and pure."

Davy looked up with vast solemnity. "Take care," said he. "There's odds of women, sir. They're like sheep's broth is women. If there's a heart and a head in them they're good, and if there isn't you might as well be supping hot water. Faces isn't the chronometer to steer your boat to the good ones. Now I've seen some you could swear to——"

"I'll swear to this one," said Lovibond with an appearance of tremendous earnestness.

Davy looked at him, gravely. "D'ye say so?" said he.

"Such eyes, Capt'n—big and full, and blue, and then pale, pale blue in the whites of them, too, like—like——"

"*I* know," said Davy; "like a blackbird's eggs with the young birds just breaking out of them."

"Just," said Lovibond. "And then her hair, Capt'n—brown, that brown with a golden bloom, as if it must have been yellow when she was a child."

"I know the sort, sir," said Davy, proudly; "like the ling on the mountains in May, with the gorse creeping under it."

"Exactly. And then her voice, Captain, her voice——"

"So you were speaking to her?" said Davy.

"No, but didn't she sing?" said Lovibond. "Such tones, soft and tremulous, rising and falling, the same as—as——"

"Same as the lark's mate," said Davy eagerly; "same as the lark's—first a burst and a mount and then a trimble and a tumble, as if she'd got a drink of water out of the clouds of heaven, and was singing and swallowing together—I know the sort; go on."

Lovibond had kept pace with Davy's warmth, but now he paused and said quietly, "I'm afraid she's in trouble."

"Poor thing!" said Davy. "How's that, mate?"

"People can never disguise their feelings in singing a hymn," said Lovibond.

"You say true, mate," said Davy; "nor in giving one out neither. Now, there was ould Kinvig. He had a sow once that wasn't too reg'lar in her pigging. Sometimes she gave many, and sometimes she gave few, and sometimes she gave none. She was a hit-and-a-missy sort of a sow, you might say. But you always know'd how the ould sow done, by the way Kinvig give out the hymn. If it was six he was loud as a clarnet, and if it was one his voice was like the trambones. But go on about the girl."

"That's all," said Lovibond. "When the service was over I walked down the aisle behind her, and touched her dress with my hand, and somehow——"

"*I* know," cried Davy. "Gave you a kind of 'lectricity shock, didn't it? Lord, alive, mate, girls is quare things."

"Then she walked off the other way," said Lovibond.

"So you don't know where she comes from?" said Davy.

"I couldn't bring myself to follow her, Capt'n."

"And right too, mate. It's sneaking. Following a girl in the streets is sneaking, and the man that done it ought to be wallopped till all's blue. But you'll see her again, I'll go bail, and maybe hear who she is. Rael true women is skess these days, sir; but I'm thinking you've got your floats down for a good one. Give her

line, mate—give her line—and if I wasn't such a downhearted chap myself I'd be helping you to land her."

Lovibond observed that Capt'n Davy was more than usually restless after this conversation, and in the course of the afternoon, while he lay in a hazy doze on the sofa, he overheard this passage between the Captain and his boy:

"Willie Quarrie, didn't you say there was an English lady staying with Mistress Quiggin at Castle Mona?"

"Miss Crows; yes," said Willie. "So Peggy Quine is telling me—a little person with a spy-glass, and that fond of the mistress you wouldn't think."

"Then just slip across in the morning, and spake to herself, and say can I see her somewheres, or will she come here, and never say nothing to nobody."

Davy's uneasiness continued far into the evening. He walked alone to and fro on the turf of the Head in front of the house, until the sun set behind the hills to the west, where a golden rim from its falling light died off on the farthest line of the sea to the east, and the town between lay in a haze of deepening purple. Lovibond knew where his thoughts were, and what new turn they had taken; but he pretended to see nothing, and he gave no sign.

Sunday as it was, Capt'n Davy's cronies came as usual at nightfall. They were a sorry

gang, but Davy welcomed them with noisy cheer. The lights were brought in, and the company sat down to its accustomed amusements. These were drinking and smoking, with gambling in disguise at intervals. Davy lost tremendously, and laughed with a sort of wild joy at every failure. He was cheated on all hands, and he knew it. Now and again he called the cheaters by hard names, but he always paid them their money. They forgave the one for the sake of the other, and went on without shame. Lovibond's gorge rose at the spectacle. He was an old gambler himself, and could have stripped every rascal of them all as naked as a lettuce after the locust. His indignation got the better of him at last, and he went out on to the Head.

The calm sea lay like a dark pavement dotted with the reflection of the stars overhead. Lights in a wide half-circle showed the line of the bay. Below was the black rock of the island of the Tower of Refuge, and the narrow strip of the old Red pier; beyond was the dark outline of the Head, and from the seaward breast of it shot the light of the lighthouse, like the glow of a kiln. It was as quiet and beautiful out there as it had been noisy and hideous within.

Lovibond had been walking to and fro for more than an hour listening to the slumbrous voices of the night, and hearing at intervals the louder bellowing from the room where Captain

Davy and his cronies were sitting, when Davy himself came out.

"I can't stand no more of it, and I've sent them home," he said. "It's like saying your prayers to a hornpipe, thinking of her and carrying on with them wastrels."

He was sober in one sense only.

"Tell me more about the little girl in church. Aw, matey, matey! Something under my waistcot went creep, creep, creep, same as a sarpent, when you first spake of her; but it's easier to stand till that jaw inside anyway. Go on, sir. Love at first sight, was it? Aw, well, the eyes isn't the only place that love is coming in at, or blind men would all be bachelors. Now mine came in at the ear."

"Did you fall in love with her singing, Capt'n?" said Lovibond.

"Yes, did I," said Davy, "and her spaking, too, and her whispering as well; but it wasn't music that brought love in at my ear—my left ear it was, matey."

"Whatever was it, then, Capt'n?" said Lovibond.

"Milk," said Davy.

"Milk?" cried Lovibond, drawing up in their walk.

"Just milk," said Davy again. "Come along, and I'll tell you. It was this way. Ould Kinvig kep' two cows, and we were calling the one Whitie and the other Brownie. Nelly and me was milking the pair of them, and she was like

a young goat, that full of tricks, and I was same as a big calf, that shy. One evening—it was just between the lights—that's when girls is like kittens, terr'ble full of capers and mischievousness—Nelly rigged up her kopie—that's her milking-stool—agen mine, so that we sat back to back, her milking Brownie and me milking Whitie. "What's she agate of now?" thinks I, but she was looking as innocent as the bas'es themselves with their ould solem faces when they were twisting round. Then we started, and there wasn't no noise in the cowhouse, but just the cows chewing constant, and, maybe, the rope running on their necks at whiles and the rattle of the milk in the pails. And I got to draeming same as I was used of, with the smell of the hay stealing down from the loft and the breath of the cows coming puff when they were blowing, and the tits in my hands agoing, when the rattle rattle aback of me stopped sudden, and I felt a squish in my ear like the syringe at the doctor's. 'What's that?' thinks I. 'Is it deaf I'm going?' But it's deaf I'd been and blind, too, and stupid for all, down to that blessed minute, for there was Nelly laughing like fits, and working like mad, and drops of Brownie's milk going trickling out of my ear on to my shoulder. 'It's not deafness,' thinks I; 'it's love;' and my breath was coming and going and making noises like the smithy bellows. So I twisted my wrist and blazed back at her, and we both fired away ding-dong, till the cows was as dry as Kinvig

when he's teetotal, and the cowhouse was like a snowstorm with a gale of wind through it, and you couldn't see a face at the one of us for swansdown. That's how Nelly and me 'came engage."

He was laughing noisily by this time, and crying alternately, with a merry shout and a husky croak, "Aw, dear, aw, dear; the days that was, sir—the days that was!"

Lovibond let him rattle on, and he talked of Nelly for an hour. He had stories without end of her, some of them as simple as a baby's prattle, some as deep as the heart of man, and splitting open the very crust of the fires of buried passion.

It was late when they turned in for the night. The lights on the line of the land were all put out, and save for the reflection of the stars only the lamps of ships at anchor lit up the waters of the bay.

"Good-night, Capt'n," said Lovibond. "I suppose you'll go to bed now?"

"Maybe so, maybe no," said Davy. "You see, I'm like Kinvig these days, and go to bed to do my thinking. The ould man's cart-wheel came off in the road once, and we couldn't rig it on again nohow. 'Hould hard, boys,' says Kinvig; and he went away home and up to the loft, and whipped off his clothes, and into the blankets and stayed there till he'd got the lay of that cart-wheel. Aw, yes, though—thinking, thinking, thinking constant—that's me when

I'm in bed. But it isn't the lying awake I'm minding. Och, no; it's the wakening up again. That's like nothing in the world but a rusty nail going driving into your skull afore a blacksmith's seven-pound sledge. Good-night, mate; good-night."

IV

NEXT day Lovibond saw Mrs. Quiggin at Castle Mona. He had come at once in obedience to her summons, and she took his sympathies by storm. It was hard for him to realise that he had not seen her somewhere before. He *had* seen her—in his own description of the girl in church, helped out, led on, directed, vivified, and transfigured by Capt'n Davy's own impetuous picture, just as the mesmerist sees what he pretends to show by aid of the eye of the mesmerised. There she sat, like one for whom life had lost its savour. Her great slow eyes, her pale and quivering face, her long deep look as she took his hand, and her slowly tightening grasp of it went through him like a knife. Not all his loyalty to Capt'n Davy could crush the thought that the man who had thrown away a jewel such as this must be a brute and a blockhead. But the sweet woman was not so lost to life that she did not see her advantage. There were some weary sighs and then she said:—

"I am in great, great trouble about my

husband. They say he is wasting his money. Is it true?"

"Too true," said Lovibond.

"And that if he goes on as he is now going he will be penniless?"

"Not impossible," said Lovibond, "provided the mad fit lasts long enough."

"Is remonstrance quite useless, Mr. Lovibond?"

"Quite, Mrs. Quiggin."

The great slow eyes began to fill, and Lovibond's gaze to seek the laces of his boots.

"It is sorrow enough to me, Mr. Lovibond, that my husband and I have quarrelled and parted, but it will be the worst grief of all if some day I should have to think that I came into his life to wreck it."

"Don't blame yourself for that, Mrs. Quiggin. It will be his own fault if he ruins himself."

"You are very good, Mr. Lovibond."

"Your husband will never blame you either."

"That will hardly reconcile me to his misfortunes."

"The man's an ass," thought Lovibond.

"I shall not trouble him much longer with my presence here," Mrs. Quiggin continued, and Lovibond looked up inquiringly.

"I am going back home soon," she added. "But if before I go some friend would help me to save my husband from himself——"

Lovibond rose in an instant. "I am at your service, Mrs. Quiggin," he said briskly. "Have you thought of anything?"

"Yes. They tell me that he is gambling, and that all the cheats of the island are winning from him."

"Well?"

The pale face turned very red, and quivered visibly about the lips.

"I have heard him say, when he has spoken of you, Mr. Lovibond, that—that—but will you forgive what I am going to tell you?"

"Anything," said Lovibond.

"That out on the coast *you* could win from anybody. I remembered this when they told me that he was gambling, and I thought if you would play against my husband—for *me*——"

"I see what you mean, Mrs. Quiggin," said Lovibond.

"I don't want the money, though he was so cruel as to say I had only married him for sake of it. But you could put it back into Dumbell's Bank day by day as you got it."

"In whose name?" said Lovibond.

The great eyes opened very wide. "His, surely," she said, falteringly.

Lovibond saw the folly of that thought, but he also recognised its tenderness.

"Very well," he said; "I'll do my best."

"Will it be wrong to deceive him, Mr. Lovibond?"

"It will be mercy itself, Mrs. Quiggin."

"To be sure, it is only to save him from ruin. But you will not believe that I am thinking of myself, Mr. Lovibond?"

"Trust me for that, Mrs. Quiggin."

"And when the wild fit is over, and my husband hears of what has been done, you will be careful not to let him know that it was I who thought of it?"

"You shall tell him yourself, Mrs. Quiggin."

"Ah! that can never, never be," she said, with a sigh. And then she murmured softly, "I don't know what my husband may have told you about me, Mr. Lovibond——"

Lovibond's ardour overcame his prudence. "He has told me that you were an angel once —and he has wronged you, the dunce and dulbert—you are an angel still."

While Lovibond was with Mrs. Quiggin Jenny Crow was with Capt'n Davy. She had clutched at his invitation with secret delight. "Just the thing," she thought. "Now, won't I give the other simpleton a piece of my mind, too?" So she had bowled off to Fort Ann with a heart as warm as toast, and a tongue that was stinging hot. But when she had got there her purpose had suddenly changed.

Davy wiped down a chair for her with the outside of his billycock and led her up to it with rude but natural manners. "The girl was a ninny to quarrel with a man like this," she thought. Nevertheless she remembered her

purpose of making him smart, and she stuck to her guns for a round or two.

"It's rael nice of you to come, ma'am," said Davy.

"It's more than you deserve," said Jenny.

"I shouldn't wonder but you think me a blundering blocket," said Davy.

"I didn't think you had sense enough to know it," said Jenny.

With that second shot Jenny's powder was spent. Davy looked down into her face and said:

"I'm terr'ble onaisy about herself, ma'am, and can't take rest at nights for thinking what's to come to her when I am gone."

"Gone?" said Jenny, rising quietly.

"That's so, ma'am," said Davy. "I'm going away—back to that ould Nick's oven I come from, and I'll want no money there."

"Is that why you're wasting it here, Captain Quiggin," said Jenny. Her gaiety was gone by this time.

"No—yes! Wasting? Well, maybe so, ma'am, maybe so. It's the way with money. Comes like the droppings out of the spout at the gable, ma'am; but goes like the tub when the bull has tipped it. Now I was thinking, ma'am——"

"Well, Captain?"

"She won't take any of it, coming from me, but I was thinking, ma'am——"

"Yes?"

Davy was pawing the carpet with one foot, and Jenny's eyes were creeping up the horn buttons of his waistcoat.

"I was thinking, ma'am, if you could take a mossle of it yourself before it's all gone, and go and live with her—you and she together somewheres—some quiet place—and make out somehow—women's mortal clever at rigging up yarns that do no harm—make out that somebody belonging to you is dead—it can't kill nobody to say that ma'am—and left you a bit of a fortune out of hand——"

Davy's restless foot was digging away at the carpet while he was stammering out these broken words:

"Haven't you no ould uncle, ma'am, that would do for the like of that?"

Jenny had to struggle with herself not to leap up and hug Capt'n Davy there and then. "What a ninny the girl was!" she thought. But she said aloud, as well as she could for her throat that was choking her, "I see what you mean, Captain Quiggin. But, Captain——"

"Ma'am?" said Davy.

"If you have so much thought—(*gulp, gulp*)—for your wife's welfare—(*gulp*)—you must love her still (*gulp, gulp*)."

"I daren't say no, ma'am," said Davy, with downcast eyes.

"And if you love her, however deeply she may have offended you, surely you should

never leave her. Come, now, Captain, forgive and forget; she is only a woman, you know."

"That's just where the shoe pinches, ma'am, so I'm taking it off. Out yonder it'll be easier to forgive. And if it'll be harder to forget, what matter?"

Jenny's eyes were beginning to fill.

"No use crying over spilt milk, is it, ma'am? The heart-ache is a sort of colic that isn't cured by drops."

Jenny was breaking down fast.

"Aw, the heart's a quare thing, ma'am. Got its hunger same as anything else. Starve it, and it'll know why. Gives you a kind of a sinking at the pit of your stomach, ma'am. Did you never feel it, ma'am?"

Davy's speech was rude enough, but that only made its emotion the more touching to Jenny. Between gulp and gulp she tried to say that if he went away he would never be happy again.

"Happy, ma'am? D'ye say happy? I'm not happy *now*," said Davy.

"It isn't everybody would think so, Captain," said Jenny, "considering how you spend your evenings—singing and laughing——"

"Laughing! More cry till wool, ma'am, same as clipping a pig."

"So your new friends, Captain, those that your riches have brought you——"

"Friends? D'ye say friends? Them wastrels! What are they? Nothing but a parcel

of Betty Quilleash's baby's stepmothers. And I'm nothing but Betty Quilleash's baby myself, ma'am; that's what I am."

The stalwart fellow did not look much like anybody's infant, but Davy did not laugh, and Jenny's eyes were streaming.

"Betty lived at Michael, ma'am, and died when her baby was suckling. There wasn't no feeding-bottles in them days, and the little one was missing the poor dead mawther mortal. But babies is like lammies, ma'am, they've got their sayson, and mostly all the women of the parish had babies that year. So first one woman would whip up Betty's baby and give it a taste of the breast, and then another would whip it up and do likewise until the little baby cuckoo was in every baby nest in the place, and living all over the street, like the rum-butter bowl and the preserving pan. But no use at all, at all. The little mite wasted away. Poor thing, poor thing! Twenty mawthers wasn't making up to it for the right one it had lost. That's me, ma'am; that's me."

Jenny Crow went away, crying openly, having promised to be a party to the innocent deception which Capt'n Davy had suggested. "That Nelly Kinvig is as hard as a flint," she told herself, bitterly. "I've no patience with such flinty people; and won't I give it her piping hot at the very next opportunity?"

V

JENNY'S opportunity was a week in coming, and various events of some consequence in this history occurred in the meantime. The first of these was that Capt'n Davy's fortune changed hands.

Davy's savings had been invested in two securities—the Liverpool Dock Trust and Dumbell's Manx Bank. His property in the trust he made over by help of the advocates, and with vast show of secrecy, to the name of Jenny Crow ; and she, on her part, by help of other advocates, and with yet more real secrecy, transferred it to the name of Mrs. Quiggin. The remains of his possessions in the bank he lost to Lovibond, who gambled with him constantly, beginning with a sovereign, which Mrs. Quiggin had given him for the purpose, and going on by a process of doubling until the stakes were prodigious. Every night he discharged his debt by cheque on Dumbell's, and every morning Lovibond repaid it into the same bank to the account of his wife. Thus, within a week, unknown to either of the two persons chiefly concerned, the money which had been the immediate cause of strife between them

passed from the offender to the offended, from the strong to the weak.

Such was the more material of the changes that had come to pass, and the more spiritual were of still greater consequence.

Lovibond and Jenny met constantly. They made various excursions through the island—to the Tynwald Hill, to Peel Castle, to Castle Rushen, the Chasms, and the Calf. Of course they persuaded each other that these trips were taken solely in the interests of their friends. It was necessary to meet; it was desirable to do so where they would be unobserved; what else was left to them but to steal away together on these little jaunts and journeys?

Then their talk was of love and estrangement and reconciliation, and how easy to quarrel, and how hard to come together again. Capt'n Davy and Mrs. Quiggin provided all their illustrations to these interesting themes, for naturally they never spoke of themselves.

"It's astonishing what geese some people can be," said Jenny.

"Astonishing," echoed Lovibond.

"Just for sake of a poor little word of confession to hold off like this," said Jenny.

"Just a poor little word," said Lovibond.

"He has only to say 'My dear, I behaved like a brute, but——'"

Only that," said Lovibond. "And she has merely to say, 'My love I behaved like a cat, but——'"

"That's all," said Jenny. "But he doesn't—men never do."

"Never," said Lovibond. "And she won't—women never will."

Then there would be innocent glances on both sides, and sly hints cast out as grappling hooks for jealousy.

"Ah, well, he's the dearest, simplest, manliest fellow in the world, and there are women who would give their two ears for him," said Jenny.

"And she's the sweetest, tenderest, loveliest woman alive, and there are men who would give their two eyes for her," said Lovibond.

"Pity they don't," said Jenny, "for all the use they make of them."

Amid such bouts of thrust and counter-thrust, the affairs of Capt'n Davy and Mrs. Quiggin nevertheless made due progress.

"She's half in love with my Manx sailor on the Head," said Jenny.

"And he's more than half in love with my lady in the church," said Lovibond.

"And now that we've made each of them fond of the other in disguise, we have just to make both of them ashamed of themselves in reality," said Jenny.

"Just that," said Lovibond.

"Ah me," said Jenny. "It isn't every pair of geese that have a couple of friends to prevent them from going astray."

"It isn't," said Lovibond. "We're the good old ganders that keep the geese together."

"Speak for yourself, sir," said Jenny.

Then came Jenny's opportunity. She had been out on one her jaunts with Lovibond, leaving Mrs. Quiggin alone in her room at Castle Mona. Mrs. Quiggin was still in her room, and still alone. Since the separation of a fortnight before that had been the constant condition of her existence. Never going out, never even going down for meals, rarely speaking of her husband, always thinking of him, and eating out her heart with pride and vexation, and anger and self-reproach.

It was the hour when the life of the island rises to the fever point; the hour of the arrival of the steamers from England. All day long the town had droned and dozed under a drowsy heat. The boatmen and carmen, with both hands in their breeches' pockets, had been burning the daylight on the esplanade; the band on the pier had been blowing music out of lungs that snored between every other blast; and the visitors had been lolling on the seats of the parade and watching the seagulls disporting on the bay with eyes that were drawing straws. But the first trail of smoke had been seen across the sea by the point of the lighthouse, and all the slugs and marmots were wide awake: promenade deserted, streets quiet and pothouses empty; but every front window of every front house occupied, and the pier crowded with people looking seaward. "She's the *Snaefell?*" "No, but the *Ben-my-Chree*—see, she has four

funnels." Then, the steaming up, the firing of the gun, the landing of the passengers, the mails and newspapers, the shouting of the touts, the bawling of the porters, the salutations, the welcomes, the passings of the time of day, the rattling of the cars, the tinkling of the trams, and the cries of the newsboys: "This way for Castle Mona!" "Falcon Cliff this way!" "Echo!" "Evening Express!" "Good passage, John?" "Good." "Five hours?" "And ten minutes." "What news over the water?" "They've caught him." "Never!" "Express!" "Fort Ann here—here for Villiers." "Comfortable lodgings, sir?" "Take a card, ma'am." "What verdict d'ye say?" "She's got ten years." "Had fine weather in the island?" "Fine." "Echo! Evening Echo!" "Fort Ann this way!" "Gladstone in Liverpool?" "Yes, spoke at Hengler's last night—fearful crush." "Castle Mona!" "Evening News!" "Peveril!" "This way Falcon Cliff!" "Express!"

Thus leaving the pier and the steamers behind them, through the streets and into the hotels, the houses, the cars and the trains, go the new comers, and the newspapers, and the letters from England, all hot and active, bringing word of the mainland, with its hub-bub and hurly-burly, to the island that has been four-and-twenty hours cut off from it—like throbbing and bounding globules of fresh blood fetching life from the fountain-head to some half-severed limb. It is an hour of tremendous vitality,

coming once a day, when the little island pulsates like a living thing. But that evening, as always since the time of the separation, Mrs. Quiggin was unmoved by it. With a book in her hand she was sitting by the open window fingering the pages, but looking listlessly over the tops of them to the line of the sea and sky, and asking herself if she should not go home to her father's house on the morrow. She had reached that point of her reverie at which something told her that she should, and something else told her that she should not, when down came Jenny Crow upon her troubled quiet, like the rush of an evening breeze.

"Such news!" cried Jenny. "I've seen him again."

Mrs. Quiggin's book dropped suddenly to her lap. "Seen him?" she said with bated breath.

"You remember—the Manx sailor on the Head," said Jenny.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Quiggin, languidly, and her book went back to before her face.

"Been to Laxey to look at the big wheel," said Jenny; "and found the Manxman coming back in the same coach. We were the only passengers, and so I heard everything. Didn't I tell you that he must be in trouble?"

"And is he?" said Mrs. Quiggin, monotonously.

"My dear," said Jenny, "he's married."

"I'm very sorry," said Mrs. Quiggin, with a

listless look towards the sea. "I mean," she added more briskly, "that I thought you liked him yourself."

"Liked him!" cried Jenny. "I loved him. He's splendid, he's glorious, he's the simplest, manliest, tenderest, most natural creature in the world. But it's just my luck—another woman has got him. And such a woman, too! A nagger, a shrew, a cat, a piece of human flint, a thankless wretch, whose whole selfish body isn't worth the tip of his little finger."

"Is she so bad as that?" said Mrs. Quiggin, smiling feebly above the top edge of her book, which covered her face up to the mouth.

"My dear," said Jenny, solemnly, "she has turned him out of the house."

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Quiggin; and away went the book on to the sofa.

Then Jenny told a woeful tale, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering, and her voice ringing with indignation. And, anxious to hit hard, she hovered so closely over the truth as sometimes to run the risk of uncovering it. The poor fellow had made long voyages abroad and saved some money. He had loved his wife passionately—that was the only blot on his character. He always dreamt of coming home, and settling down in comfort for the rest of his life. He had come at last, and a fine welcome had awaited him. His wife was as proud as Lucifer—the daughter of some greengrocer, of course. She had been ashamed

of her husband, apparently, and settling down hadn't suited her. So she had nagged the poor fellow out of all peace of mind and body, taken his money, and turned him adrift.

Jenny's audacity carried her through, and Mrs. Quiggin, who was now wide awake, listened eagerly. "Can it be possible that there are women like that?" she said, in a hushed whisper.

"Indeed, yes," said Jenny; "and men are simple enough to prefer them to better people."

"But, Jenny," said Mrs. Quiggin, with a far-away look, "we have only heard one story, you know. If we were inside the Manxman's house —if we knew all—might we not find that there are two sides to its troubles?"

"There are two sides to its street-door," said Jenny, "and the husband is on the outside of it."

"She took his money, you say, Jenny?"

"Indeed she did, Nelly, and is living on it now."

"And then turned him out of doors?"

"Well, so to speak, she made it impossible for him to live with her."

"What a cat she must be!" said Mrs. Quiggin.

"She must," said Jenny. "And, would you believe it, though she has treated him so shamefully yet he loves her still."

"Why do you think so, Jenny?" said Mrs. Quiggin.

"Because," said Jenny, "though he is always

sober when I see him I suspect that he is drinking himself to death. He said as much."

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Quiggin. "But men should not take these things so much to heart. Such women are not worth it."

"No, are they?" said Jenny.

"They have hardly a right to live," said Mrs. Quiggin.

"No, have they?" said Jenny.

"There should be a law to put down nagging wives the same as biting dogs," said Mrs. Quiggin.

"Yes, shouldn't there?" said Jenny.

"Once on a time men took their wives like their horses on trial for a year and a day, and really with some women there would be something to say for the old custom."

"Yes, wouldn't there?" said Jenny.

"The woman who is nothing of herself apart from her husband, and has no claim to his consideration, except on the score of his love, and yet uses him only to abuse him, and takes his very money, having none of her own, and still——"

"Did I say she took his money, Nelly?" said Jenny. "Well, of course—not to be unfair—some men are such generous fools, you know—he may have given it to her."

"No matter; taken or given, she has got it, I suppose, and is living on it now."

"Oh yes, certainly, that's very sure," said Jenny; "but then she's his wife, you see, and naturally her maintenance——"

"Maintenance!" cried Mrs. Quiggin. "How many children has she got?"

"None," said Jenny. "At least I haven't heard of any."

"Then she ought to be ashamed of herself for thinking of such a thing."

"I quite agree with you, Nelly," said Jenny.

"If I were a man," said Mrs. Quiggin, "and my wife turned me out of doors——"

"Did I say that, Nelly? Well, not exactly that—no, not turned him out of doors exactly, Nelly."

"It's all one, Jenny. If a woman behaves so that her husband cannot live with her what is she doing but turning him out of doors?"

"But, Nelly!" cried Jenny, rising suddenly. "What about Captain Davy?"

Then there was a blank silence. Mrs. Quiggin had been borne along on the torrent of her indignation, brooking no objection, and sweeping down every obstacle, until brought up sharply by Jenny's question—like a river that flows fastest and makes most noise where the boulders in its course are biggest, but breaks itself at last against the brant sides of some impassable rock. She drew her breath in one silent spasm, turned from feverish red to deadly pale, quivered about the mouth, twitched about the eyelids, rose stiffly on her half-rigid limbs, and then fell on Jenny with loud and hot reproaches.

"How dare you, Jenny Crow?" she cried.

"Dare what, my dear?" said Jenny.

"Say that I've turned my husband out of doors, and that I've taken his money, and that I am a cat and shrew, and a nagger, and that there ought to be a law to put me down."

"My dear Nelly," said Jenny, "it was yourself that said so. I was speaking of the wife of the Manx sailor."

"Yes, but you were thinking of me," said Mrs. Quiggin.

"I was thinking of her," said Jenny.

"You were thinking of me as well," said Mrs. Quiggin.

"I tell that I was only thinking of her," said Jenny.

"You were thinking of me, Jenny Crow—you know you were; and you meant that I was as bad as she was. But circumstances alter cases, and my case is different. My husband is turning *me* out of doors: and, as for his money, *I* didn't ask for it and I don't want it. I'll go back home to-morrow morning. I will—indeed, I will. I'll bear this torment no longer."

So saying, with many gasps and gulps, breaking at last into a burst of weeping, she covered her face with both hands and flounced out of the room. Jenny watched her go, then listened to the sobs that came from the other side of the door, and said beneath her breath, "Let her cry, poor girl. The crying has to be done by somebody, and it might as well be she.

Crying is good for a woman sometimes, but when a man cries it hurts so much."

Half an hour later, as Jenny was leaving the room for dinner, she heard Mrs. Quiggin telling Peggy Quine to ask at the office for her bill, and to order a carriage to be ready at the door for her at eleven o'clock in the morning.

When the first burst of her vexation was spent Mrs. Quiggin made a secret and startling discovery. The man whom Jenny Crow had stumbled upon, first on the Head and afterwards on the Laxey coach, could be no one in the world but her own husband. A certain shadowy suspicion of this had floated hazily before her mind at the beginning, but she had dismissed the idea and forgotten it. Now she felt so sure of it that it was beyond contempt of question. So the Manx sailor in whom Jenny had found so much to admire—the simple, brave, manly, generous, natural soul, all fresh air and by rights all sunshine—was no other than Capt'n Davy Quiggin! That thought brought the hot blood tingling to Mrs. Quiggin's cheeks with sensations of exquisite delight, and never before had her husband seemed so fine in her own eyes as now, when she saw him so noble in the eyes of another. But close behind this delicious reflection, like the green blight at the back of the apple blossom, lay a withering and cankering thought. The Manx sailor's wife—she who had so behaved that it was impossible for him to live with her—she who was a cat, a

shrew, a nagger, a thankless wretch, a piece of human flint, a creature that should be put down by the law as it puts down biting dogs—she whose whole selfish body was not worth the tip of his little finger—was no one else than herself!

Then came another burst of weeping, but this time the tears were of shame, not of vexation, and they washed away every remaining evil humour and left the vision clear. She had been in the wrong, and was judged out of her own mouth; but she had no intention of fitting on the cap of the unknown woman. Why should she? Jenny did not know who the woman was—that was as plain as a pickle. Then where was the good of confessing?

VI

While Jenny Crow was doing her easy duty at Castle Mona, Lovibond was engaged in a task of yet more simplicity at Fort Ann. On returning from Laxey he found Captain Davy occupied with Willie Quarrie in preparation for a farewell supper to be given that night to the cronies who had helped him to spend his fortune. These worthies had deserted his company since Lovibond had begun to take all the winnings, including some of their own earlier ones; and hence the necessity to invite them. "There's ould Billy, the carrier—ask him," Davy was saying, as he lay stretched on the sofa, puffing whorls of grey smoke from a pipe of thick twist. "And then there's Kerruish, the churchwarden, and Kewley, the crier, and Hugh Corlett, the blacksmith, and Tommy Tubman, the brewer, and Willie Qualtrough, that keeps the lodging-house contagious, and the fat man that bosses the Sick and Indignant Society, and the long, lanky shanks that is the headpiece of the Friendly and Malevolent Association—got them all down, boy?"

"They're all through-others in my head

already, Capt'n," groaned Willie Quarrie in despair, as he struggled at the table to keep pace by his slow pen with Davy's impetuous tongue.

"Then ask whosomever you plaze, boy," said Davy. "What's it saying in the ould Book: 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in.' Only it's the back coorts and the public-houses this time, and you'll be wanting no grappling-hooks to fetch them. Just whip a whisky bottle under your arm, and they'll be asking for no other invitation. Reminds me, sir," he added, looking up as Lovibond entered, "reminds me of little Jimmy Quayle's aisy way of fetching poor Hughie Collister from the bottom of Ramsey harbour. Himself and Hughie were same as brothers—that thick—and they'd been middling hard on the drink together, and one night Hughie, going home to Andreas, tumbled over the bridge by the sandy road and got hisself washed away and drowned. So the boys fetched grapplings and went out immadient to drag for the body, but Jimmy took another notion. He rigged up a tremenjous long pole, like your mawther's clothes' prop on washing day, and tied a string to the top of it, and baited the end of the string with an empty bottle of Ould Tom, and then sat hisself down on the end of the jetty, same as a man that's going fishing. 'Lord-a-massy, Jimmy,' says the boys, looking up out of the boat; 'what-

ever in the name of goodness are you doing theer?' 'They're telling me,' says Jemmy, bobbing the gin-bottle up and down constant, flip-a-flop, flip-a-flop, atop of the water, 'they're telling me,' says he, 'that poor ould Hughie is down yonder, and I'm thinking there isn't nothing in the island that'll fetch him up quicker till this.'"

"But what is going on here, Capt'n?" said Lovibond, with an inclination of his head towards the table where Willie Quarrie was still labouring with his invitations.

"It's railly wuss till ever, sir,' groaned Willie from behind his pen.

"What does it mean?" said Lovibond.

"It manes that I'm sailing to-morrow," said Davy.

"Sailing!" cried Lovibond.

"That's so," said Davy. "Back to the ould oven we come from. Pacific steamer laves Liverpool by the afternoon tide, and we'll catch her aisy if we take the *Snaefell* in the morning. Fixed a couple of berths by telegraph, and paid through Dumbell's. Only ninety pounds the two—for'ard passage—but nearly claned out at that. What's the odds though? Enough left to give the boys a blow-out to-night, and then, heigho! stone broke, cut your stick and get out of it."

"A couple of berths? Did you say two?" said Lovibond.

"I'm taking Willie along with me," said

Davy; "and he's that joyful at the thought of it that you can't get a word out of him for hallelujahs."

Willie's joy expressed itself at that moment in a moan, as he rose from the table with a woe-begone countenance, and went out on his errand of invitation.

"But you'll stay on," said Davy. "Eh?"

"No," said Lovibond, in a melancholy voice.

"Why not, then?" said Davy.

Lovibond did not answer at once, and Davy heaved up to a sitting posture that he might look into his face.

"Why, man; what's this—what's this?" said Davy. "You're looking as down as ould Kinvig at the camp meeting, when the preacher afore him had used up all his tex'es. What's going doing?"

Lovibond settled himself on the sofa beside Davy, and drew a deep breath. "I've seen her again, Capt'n," he said, solemnly.

"The sweet little lily in the church, sir?" said Davy.

"Yes," said Lovibond; and, after another deep breath, "I've spoken to her."

"Out with it, sir; out with it," said Davy, and then, putting one hand on Lovibond's knee caressingly, "I've seen trouble in my time, mate; you may trust me—go on, what is it?"

"She's married," said Lovibond.

Davy gave a prolonged whistle. "That's bad," he said. "I'm symperthising with you. You've been fishing with another man's floats, and losing your labour. I'm feeling for you. 'Deed I am though."

"It's not myself I'm thinking of," said Lovibond. "It's that angel of a woman. She's not only married, but married to a brute."

"That's wuss still," said Davy.

"And not only married to a brute," said Lovibond, "but parted from him."

Davy gave yet a longer whistle. "O-ho, O-ho! A quarrel is it?" he cried. "Husband and wife, eh? Aw, take care, sir, take care. Women is 'cute. Extraordinary wayses they've at them of touching a man up under the watch-pocket of the weskit till you'd never think nothing but they're angels fresh down from heaven, and you could work at the docks to keep them; but maybe cunning as ould Harry all the time, and playing the divil with some poor man. It's me for knowing them. Husband and wife? That'll do, that'll do. Lave them alone, mate, lave them alone.'

"Ah, the sweet creature has had a terrible time of it!" said Lovibond, lying back and looking up at the ceiling.

"I'll lave it with you," said Davy, charging his pipe afresh as a signal of his neutrality.

"He must have led her a fearful life," continued Lovibond.

Davy lit up, and puffed vigorously.

"It would appear," said Lovibond, "that though she is so like a lady, she is entirely dependent upon her husband."

"Well, well," said Davy, between puff and puff.

"He didn't forget that either, for he seems to have taunted her with her poverty."

A growl, like an oath half smothered by smoke, came from Davy.

"Indeed, that was the cause of quarrel."

"She did well to lave him," said Davy, watching the coils of his smoke going upward.

"Nay, it was he who left her."

"The villain!" said Davy. But after Davy had delivered himself so there was nothing to be heard for the next ten seconds but the sucking of lips over the pipe.

"And now," said Lovibond, "she cannot stir out of doors but she finds herself the gossip of the island, and the gaze of every passer-by."

"Poor thing, poor thing!" said Davy.

"He must be a low, vulgar fellow," said Lovibond; "and yet—would you believe it—she wouldn't hear a word against him."

"The sweet woman!" said Davy.

"It's my firm belief that she loves the fellow still," said Lovibond.

"I wouldn't trust," said Davy. "That's the ways of women, sir; I've seen it myself. Aw, women is quare, sir, wonderful quare."

"And yet," said Lovibond, "while she is

sitting pining to death indoors he is enjoying himself night and day with his coarse companions."

Davy put his pipe on the mantelpiece. "Now the man that does the like of that is a scoundrel," he said, warmly.

"I agree with you, Capt'n," said Lovibond.

"He's a brute!" said Davy, more loudly.

"Of course we've only heard one side of the story," said Lovibond.

"No matter; he's a brute and a scoundrel," said Davy. "Don't you hould with me there, mate?"

"I do," said Lovibond. "But still, who knows? She may—I say she may—be one of those women who want their own way."

"All women wants it," said Davy. "It's mawther's milk to them—Mawther Eve's milk, as you may say."

"True, true!" said Lovibond; "but though she looks so sweet she may have a temper."

"And what for shouldn't she?" said Davy. "D'ye think God A'mighty meant it all for the men?"

"Perhaps," said Lovibond, "she turned up her nose at his coarse ways and rough comrades."

"And right, too," said Davy. "Let him keep his dirty trousses to hisself. Who is he?"

"She didn't tell me that," said Lovibond.

"Whoever he is he's a wastrel," said Davy.

"I'm afraid you're right, Capt'n," said Lovibond.

"Women is priv'leged where money goes," said Davy. "If they haven't got it by heirship they can't make it by indus'try, and to accuse them of being without it is taking a mane advantage. It's hitting below the belt, sir. Accuse a man if you like—ten to one he's lazy—but a woman—never, sir, never, never!"

Davy was tramping the room by this time, and making it ring with the voice as of a lion and the foot as of an elephant.

"More till that, sir," he said. "A good girl with nothing at her who takes a bad man with a million cries tally with the craythe the day she marries him. What has he brought her? His dirty, mucky, measly money, come from the Lord knows where. What has *she* brought him? Herself, and everything she is and will be, stand or fall, sink or swim, blow high, blow low—to sail by his side till they cast anchor together at last. Don't you hould with me there, sir?"

"I do, Capt'n, I do," said Lovibond.

"And the ruch man that goes bearing up alongside a girl that's sweet and honest, and then twitting her with being poorer till hisself, is a dirt and divil, and ought to be walloped out of the company of dacent men."

"But, Capt'n," said Lovibond, falteringly, "Capt'n . . . ."

"What?"

"Wasn't Mrs. Quiggin a poor girl when you married her?"

At that word Davy looked like a man newly awakened from a trance. His voice, which had rung out like a horn, seemed to wheeze back like a whistle; his eyes, which had begun to blaze, took a fixed and stupid gaze; his lips parted; his head dropped forward; his chest fell inward; and his big shoulders seemed to shrink. He looked about him vacantly, put one hand up to his forehead and said in a broken underbreath, "Lord-a-massy! What am I doing? What am I saying?"

The painful moment was broken by the arrival of the first of the guests. It was Kerruish, the churchwarden, a very secular person, deep in the dumps over a horse which he had bought at Castletown fair the week before (with money cheated out of Davy), and lost by an attack of the worms that morning. "Butts in the stomach, sir," he moaned; "they're bad, sir, aw, they're bad."

"Nothing wuss," said Davy. "I know them. Ate all the goodness out of you and lave you without bowels. Men has them as well as horses—only we call friends instead."

The other guests arrived one by one—the blacksmith, the crier, the brewer, the lodging-house keeper, and the two secretaries of the charitable societies (whose names were "spells" too big for Davy), and the keeper of a home for lost dogs. They were a various and motley

company of the riff-raff and raggabash of the island—young and elderly, silent and glib—rough as a pigskin, and smooth as their sleeves at the elbow; with just one feature common to the whole pack of pick-thanks, and that was a look of shallow cunning.

Davy received them with noisy welcomes and equal cheer, but he had the measure of every man of them all, down to the bottom of their fob pockets. The cloth was laid, the supper was served, and down they sat at the table.

"Anywhere, anywhere!" cried Davy, as they took their places. "The mate is the same at every seat."

"Ay, ay," they laughed, and then fell to without ceremony.

"Only wait till I've done the carving, and we'll all start fair," said Davy.

"Coorse, coorse," they answered, from mouths half full already.

"That's what Kinvig said when he was cutting up his sermon into firstly, secondly, thirdly and fourteenthly."

"Ha, ha! Kinvig! I'd drink the ould man's health if I had anything," cried the blacksmith, with a wink at his opposite neighbour.

"No liquor?" said Davy, looking up to sharpen the carving-knife on the steel. "Am I laving you dry like herrings in the hould?"

"Season us, capt'n," cried the blacksmith, amid general laughter from the rest.

"Aw, lave you alone for that," said Davy.

"If you're like myself you're in pickle enough already."

Then there were more winks and louder laughter.

"Mate!" shouted Davy over his shoulder to the waiter behind him, "a gallon to every gentleman."

"Ay, ay," from all sides of the table in various tones of satisfaction.

"Yes, sir—of course, sir; beg pardon, sir; here, sir," said the waiter.

"Boys, healths apiece!" cried Davy.

"Healths apiece, Capt'n," answered numerous thick voices, and up leapt a line of yellow glasses.

"Ate, drink—there's plenty, boys; there's plenty," said Davy.

"Aw, plenty, Capt'n—plenty."

"Come again, boys, come again," said Davy, from time to time; "but clane plates—aw, clane plates though—I hould with being nice at your males for all, and no pigging."

Thus the supper went on for an hour, and then Davy by way of grace said, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise His holy name."

"A 'propriate tex' too," said the churchwarden. "Aw, it's wonderful the scriptural the Capt'n's getting when he's a bit crooked," he whispered behind the back of his hand.

After that Davy stretched back in his chair and cried, "Your pipes in your faces, boys.

Smook up, smook up; chimleys everywhere, same as Douglas at breakfast-time."

For Davy's sake Lovibond had sat at table with the guests, though their voracity had almost turned his stomach. At sight of the green light of greed in their eyes he had said to himself, "Davy is a rough fellow, but a born Christian. These creatures are hogs. Why doesn't his gorge rise at them?" When the supper was done, and while the cloth was being removed, amid the clatter of dishes and the striking of lights, Lovibond rose and slipped out of the room.

Davy saw him go, and from that moment he became constrained and silent. Sucking at his pipe and devoting himself steadily to the drink, he answered in *hums* and *ha's* and *that'll do's* to the questions put to him, and his laughter came out of him at intervals in jumps and jerks like water from the neck of a bottle.

"What's agate of the Capt'n?" the men whispered. "He's quiet to night—quiet uncommon."

After a while Davy heaved up and followed Lovibond. He found him walking to and fro on the soft turf outside the window. The night was calm and beautiful. In the sky a sea of stars and a great full moon; on the land a line of gas jets, and on the dark bay a point of rolling light. No sound but the distant hum of traffic in the town, the inarticulate shout of a sailor on one of the ships outside, and the

rock-row rock-row of the oars in the rowlocks of some unseen boat gliding into the harbour below.

Davy drew a long breath. "So you think," said he, "that the sweet woman in the church is loving her husband in spite of all?"

"Fear she is, poor fool," said Lovibond.

"Bless her!" said Davy, beneath his breath. "D'ye think, now," said he, "that all women are like that?"

"Many are—too many!" said Lovibond.

"Equal to forgiving and forgetting, eh?" said Davy.

"Yes—the sweet simpletons—and taking the men back as well," said Lovibond.

"Extraordinary!" said Davy. "Aw, matey, matey, men's only muck where woman comes. Women is reg'lar eighteen-carat goold. It's me to know it too. There was the mawther herself now. My father was a bit of a rip—God forgive his son for saying it—and once he went trapsing after a girl and got her into trouble. An imperant young hussey anyway, but no matter. Coorse the mawther wouldn't have no truck with her; but one day she died sudden, and then the child hadn't nobody but the neighbours to look to it. 'Go for it, Davy,' says the mawther to me. It was evening, middling late after the herrings, and when I got to the kitchen windey there was the little one atop of the bed in her night-dress saying her bits of prayers: 'God bless mawther and everybody,' and all

to that. She couldn't get out of the 'mawther' yet, being always used of it, and there never was no 'father' in her little tex'es. Poor thing! she come along with me, bless you, like a lammie that you'd pick out of the snow. Just hitched her hands round my neck and fell asleep in my arms going back, with her putty face looking up at the stars same as an angel's—soft and woolly to your lips like milk straight from the cow—and her little body smelling sweet and damp, same as the breath of a calf. And when the mawther saw me she smoothed her brat and dried her hands, and catched at the little one, and chuckled over her, and clucked at her and kissed her, with her own face slushed like rain, till yer'd have thought nothing but it was one of her own that had been lost and was found agen. Aw, women for your life, mate, for forgiveness."

Lovibond did not speak, and Davy began to laugh in a husky voice.

"Bless me, the talk a man will put out when he's a bit over the rope and thinking of ould times," he said.

"Sign that I'm thirsty," he added; and then walked towards the window. "But the father could never forgive hisself," he said as he was stepping through, "and if I done wrong to a woman, neither could I—I've that much of the ould man in me anyway."

When he got back to the room the air was dense with tobacco smoke, and his guests were shouting for his company. "Capt'n Davy!"

"Where's Capt'n Davy?" "Aw, here's the man himself." "Been studying the stars, Capt'n?" "Well, that's a bit of navigation, though." "Navigation by starlight—I know the sort. Navigating up alongside a pretty girl, eh, Capt'n?"

There were rough jokes, and strange stories, and more liquor and loud laughter, and for a time Davy took his part in everything. But after a while he grew quiet again, and absent in manner, and he glanced up at intervals in the direction of the window. A new thought had come to him. It made the sweat to break out at the top of his forehead, and then he heard no more of the clatter around him than the rum-hum-drum as of a train in a tunnel, pierced sometimes by the shrill scream as of an occasional whistle. Presently he rolled up again, and went out once more to Lovibond.

The thought that had seized him was agony, and he could not broach it at once. So he beat about it for a moment, and then came down on it with crash.

"Sitting alone, is she, poor thing?" he said.

"Alone," said Lovibond.

"I know, I know," said Davy. "Like a bird on a bough calling mournful for her mate; but he's gone, he's down, maybe worse, but lost anyway. Yet if he should ever come back now —eh?"

"He'll have to be quick then," said Lovi-

bond; "for she intends to go home to her people soon."

"Did you say she was for going home?" said Davy, eagerly. "Home where—where to —to England?"

"No," said Lovibond. "Haven't I told you she's a Manx woman."

"A Manx woman, is she?" said Davy. "What's her name?"

"I didn't ask her that," said Lovibond."

"Then where's her home?" said Davy.

"I forget the name of the place," said Lovibond. "Balla—something."

"Is it——is it——": Davy was speaking very thickly: "is it Ballaugh, sir?"

"That's it," said Lovibond. "And her father's farm—I heard the name of the farm as well—Balla—balla—something else—oh, Ballavalley."

"Ballavolley?" said Davy.

"Exactly," said Lovibond.

Davy breathed heavily, swayed slightly, and rolled against Lovibond as they walked side by side.

"Then you know the place, Capt'n?" said Lovibond.

Davy laughed noisily. "Ay, I know it," he said.

"And the girl's father too, I suppose?" said Lovibond.

Davy laughed bitterly. "Ay, and the girl's father too," he said.

"And the girl herself, perhaps?" said Lovibond.

Davy laughed almost fiercely, "Ay, and the girl herself," he said.

Lovibond did not spare him. "Then," said he, in an innocent way, "you must know her husband also."

Davy laughed wildly. "I wouldn't trust," he said.

"He's a brute — isn't he?" said Lovibond.

"Ugh!" Davy's laughter stopped very suddenly.

"A fool, too—is he not?" said Lovibond.

"Ay—a damned fool!" said Davy out of the depths of his throat, and then he laughed and reeled again, and gripped at Lovibond's sleeve to keep himself erect.

"Helloa!" he cried, in another voice; "I'm rocking full like a ship with a rolling cargo, and my head is as thick as Taubman's brewery on boiling day."

He was a changed man from that instant onward. An angel of God that had been breathing on his soul was driven out by a devil of despair. The conviction had settled on him that he was a dastard. Lovibond remembered the story of his father, and trembled for what he had done.

Davy stumbled back through the window into the room, singing lustily—

"O, Molla Char—aine, where got you your gold?
Lone, lone, you have le—eft me here,
Oh, not in the Curragh, deep under the mo—old,
Lone, lo—one and void of cheer,
Lone, lo—one, and void of cheer."

His cronies received him with shouts of welcome. "You'll be walking the crank yet, Capt'n," said they, in mockery of his unsteady gait. His altered humour suited them. "Cards," they cried; "cards—a game for good luck."

"Hould hard," said Davy. "Fair do's. Send for the landlord first."

"What for?" they asked. "To stop us? He'll do that quick enough.

"You'll see," said Davy. "Willie," he shouted, "bring up the skipper."

Willie Quarrie went out on his errand, and Davy called for a song. The Crier gave one line three times, and broke down as often. "I linger round this very spot— I linger round this ve—ery spot—I linger round this very——"

"Don't do it any longer, mate," cried Davy. "Your song is like Kinvig's first sermon. The ould man couldn't get no farther till his tex', so he gave it out three times—'I am the Light of the World—I am the Light of the World—I am the Light——' 'Maybe so, brother,' says ould Kennish, in the pew below; 'but you want snuffing. Come down out of that.'"

Loud peals of wild laughter followed, and Davy's own laughter rang out wildest and

maddest of all. Then up came the landlord with his round face smiling. What was the Captain's pleasure?

"Landlord," cried Davy, "tell your men to fill up these glasses, and then send me your bill for all I owe you, and make it cover everything I'll want till to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow will do for the bill, Captain," said the landlord. "I'm not afraid that you'll cut your country."

"Aren't you, though? Then the more fool you," said Davy. "Send it up, my shining sunflower; send it up."

"Very well, Captain, just to humour you," said the landlord, backing himself out with his head in his chest.

"Why, where are you going to, Capt'n?" cried many voices at once.

"Wherever there's a big cabbage growing, boys," said Davy.

The bill came up, and Willie Quarrie examined it. "Shocking!" cried Willie; "it's really shocking! Shillings apiece for my breakfas'es—now that's what I call a reg'lar piece of ambition."

Davy turned out his pockets on to the table. The pockets were many, and were hidden away, back and front and side, in every slack and tight place in his clothes. Gold, silver, and copper came mixed and loose from all of them, and he piled up the money in a little heap before him. When all was out he picked five sovereigns from the haggis of coin and put them

back into his waistcoat-pocket, while he screwed up one eye into the semblance of a wink, and said to Willie, "That'll see us over." Then he called for a sight of the bill, glanced at the total, and proceeded to count out the amount of it. This being done, he rolled the money in the paper, screwed it up like a pennyworth of lozenges, and sent it down to the landlord with his "bes' respec's." After that he straightened his chest, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, nodded his head downwards at the money remaining on the table, and said, "Men, see that? It's every ha'penny I'm worth in the world. A month ago I came home with a nice warm fortune at me. That's what's left, and when it's gone I'm up the spout."

The men looked at each other in blank surprise, and began to mutter among themselves, "What game is he agate of now?" "Aw, it's true." "True enough, you go bail." "I wouldn't trust; he's been so reckless." "Twenty thousand, they're saying." "Aw, he's been helped—there's that Mister Loviboy, a power of money the craythur must have had out of him." "Well, sarve him right; fools and their money is rightly parted."

Thus they croaked and crowed, and though Davey was devoting himself to the drink he heard them.

A wild light shot into his eyes, but he only laughed more noisily and talked more incessantly.

"Come, lay down, d'ye hear," he cried. "Do you think I care for the fortune? I care nothing, not I. I've had a bigger loss till that in my time."

"Lord save us, Capt'n — when?" cried one.

"Never mind when—not long ago, any way," said Davy.

"And you had heart to start afresh, Capt'n, eh?" cried another.

"Heart, you say? Maybe so, maybe no," said Davy. "But stow this jaw. Here's my harvest-home, boys, my Melliah, only I'm bringing back the tares—who's game to toss for it? Equal stakes, sudden death!"

The brewer tossed with him and won. Davy brushed the money across the table, and laughed more madly than ever. "I care nothing, not I, say what you like," he cried again and again, though no one disputed his protestation.

But the manner of the cronies changed towards him nevertheless. Some fell to patronising him, some to advising him, and some to sneering at the hubbub he was making.

"Well, well," he cried. "One glass and a toast, anyway, and part friends for all. Aisy there! Silence! Hush! Chink up! (Hear, hear!) Are you ready? Here goes, boys! The biggest blockit in the island, bar none—Capt'n Davy Quiggin."

At that the raggabash who had been clinking glasses pretended to be mightily offended in

their dignity. They looked about for their hats, and began to shuffle out.

"Lave me, then; lave me," cried Davy. "Lave me now, you Noah's ark of creeping things! Lave me, I'm stone broke. Ay, lave me, you dogs, with your noses in the snow. I'm done, I'm done!"

As the rascals who had cheated and robbed him trooped out like men aggrieved, Davy broke into a stave of another wild song:

> "'I'm hunting the wren,' said Robbin to Bobbin,
> 'I'm hunting the wren,' said Richard to Robbin,
> 'I'm hunting the wren,' said Jack of the Lhen,
> 'I'm hunting the wren,' said every one."

When the men were gone Lovibond came back by the window. The room was dense with the fumes of dead smoke, and foul with the smell of stale liquor. Broken pipes lay on the table amid the refuse of spilt beer, and a candle, at which the pipes had been lighted, still stood there burning.

Davy was reeling about madly, and singing and laughing in gust on gust. His face was afire with the drink that he had taken, and his throat was guggling and sputtering.

"I care nothing, not I—say what you like; I've had worse losses in my time," he cried.

He plunged his right hand into his breast and drew out something.

"See that, mate?" he said, and held it up under the glass chandelier.

It was a little curl of brown hair, tied across the middle with a piece of faded blue ribbon.

"See it?" he cried, in a husky gurgle. "It's all I've got left in the world."

He held it up to the light and looked at it, and laughed until the glass pendants of the chandelier swung and jingled with the vibration of his voice.

"The gorse under the ling, eh? There you are then! *She* gave it me. Yes, though, on the night I sailed. My gough! The ruch and proud I was that night anyway! I was a homeless beggar, but I might have owned the stars, for by God, I was walking on them going away."

He reeled again, and laughed as if in mockery of himself, and then said, "That's ten year ago, mate, and I've kep' it ever since. I have though, here in my breast, and it's druv out wuss things. When I've been far away foreign, and losing heart a bit, and down with the fever, maybe, in that ould hell, and never looking to see herself again, no, never, I've been touching it gentle and saying to myself, soft and low, like a sort of an angel's whisper, 'Nelly is with you, Davy. She isn't so very far away, boy; she's here for all.' And when I've been going into some dirt of a place that a dacent man shouldn't, it's been cutting at my ribs, same as a knife, and crying like mad, 'Hould hard, Davy; you can't take Nelly in *theer*.' When I've been hot it's been keeping me cool, and

when I've been cold it's been keeping me warm, better till any comforter. D'ye see it, sir? We're ould comrades, it and me, the best that's going, and never no quarrelling and no words neither. Ten years together, sir; blow high, blow low. But we're going to part at last."

Then he picked up the candle in his left hand, still holding the lock of hair in his right.

"Good-bye, ould friend!" he cried, in a shrill voice, rolling his head to look at the curl, and holding it over the candle. "We're parting company to-night. I'm going where I can't take you along with me—I'm going to the divil. So long! S'long! I'll never strook you, nor smooth you, nor kiss you no more! S'long!"

He put the curl to his lips, holding it tremblingly between his great fingers and thumb. Then he clutched it in his palm, reeled a step backward, swung the candle about and dashed it on to the floor.

"I can't, I can't," he cried. "God A'mighty, I can't. It's Nelly—Nelly—my Nelly—my little Nell!"

The curl went back into his breast. He sank into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and wept aloud as little children do.

VII

When Mrs. Quiggin came down to breakfast next morning, a change both in her appearance and in her manner caught the eye and ear of Jenny Crow. Her fringe was combed back from her forehead, and her speech, even in the first salutation, gave a delicate hint of the broad Manx accent. "Ho, ho! what's this?" thought Jenny, and she had not long to wait for an answer.

An English waiter, who affected the ways of a French one, was fussing around with needless inquiries—*would Madame have this? would Madame do that?*—and when this person had scraped himself out of the room Mrs. Quiggin drew a long breath and said, "I don't think I care so very much for this sort of thing after all, Jenny."

"What sort of thing, Nelly?"

"Waiters and servants, and hotels and things," said Nelly.

"Really!" said Jenny.

"It's wonderful how much happier you are when you can be your own servant, and boil your own kettle and mash your own tea, and

lay your own cloth, and clear away and wash up afterwards."

"Do you say so, Nelly?"

"'Deed I do, though, Jenny. There's some life in the like of that—seeing to yourself and such like. And what are the pleasures of towns and streets and hotels and servants, and such botherations to those of a sweet old farm that is all your own somewhere? And, to think—to think, Jenny, getting up in the summer morning before the sun itself, when the light is that cool dead grey, and the last stars are dying off, and the first birds are calling to their mates that are still asleep, and then going round to the cowhouse in the clear, crisp, ringing air, and startling the rabbits and the hares that are hopping about in the haggard—Oh! it's delightful!"

"Really now!" said Jenny.

"And then the men coming downstairs, half awake and yawning, in their shirt-sleeves and their stocking-feet, and pushing on their boots and clattering out to the stable, and shouting to the horses that are stamping in their stalls; and then you yourself busy as Trap's wife laying the cups and saucers, and sending the boys to the well for water, and filling the big crock to the brim, and hanging the kettle on the hook, and setting somebody to blow the fire while the gorse flames and crackles; and bustling here, and bustling there, and stirring yourself terrible, and getting breakfast over, and starting every-

body away to his work in the fields—aw, there's nothing like it in the world."

"And do *you* think that, Nelly?" said Jenny.

"Why, yes; why shouldn't I?" said Nelly.

"Well, well," said Jenny. "'There's nowt so queer as folk,' as they say in Manchester."

"What do you mean, Jenny Crow?"

"I fancy I see you," said Jenny, "bowling off to Balla—what d'ye call it?—and doing all that *by yourself*."

"Oh!" said Nelly.

Mrs. Quiggin had begun to speak in a voice that was something between a shrill laugh and a cry, and she ended with a smothered gurgle such as comes from the throat of a pea-hen. After breakfast Peggy Quine came chirping around with a hundred inquiries about the packing of luggage which was then proceeding, with a view to the carriage that had been ordered for eleven o'clock. Mrs. Quiggin betrayed only the most languid interest in these hurrying operations, and settled herself with her needlework in a chair near to Jenny Crow. Jenny watched her, and thought, "Now, wouldn't she jump at a good excuse for not going at all?"

Presently Mrs. Quiggin said, in a tone of well-acted unconcern, "And so you say that the poor man you tell me of is still loving his wife in spite of all she has done to him?"

"Yes, Nelly. All men are like that—more fools they," said Jenny.

Nelly's face brightened over the needles in her hand, and her parted lips seemed to whisper, "Bless them!" But in a note of delicious insincerity she only said aloud, "Not all, Jenny, surely not all."

"Yes, all," said Jenny, with emphasis. "Do you think I don't know the men better than you do?"

Nelly dropped her needles and raised her face. "Why, Jenny," she said, "however can that be? — you've never even been married."

"That's why, my dear," said Jenny.

Nelly laughed; then, returning to the attack, she said, with a poor pretence at a yawn, "So you think a man may love a woman even after—after she has turned him out-of-doors, as you say?"

"Yes, but that isn't to say that he'll ever come back to her," said Jenny.

The needles dropped to the lap again. "No? Why shouldn't he then?"

"Why? Because men are never good at the bended knee business," said Jenny. "A man on his knees is ridiculous. It must be his legs that look so silly. If I had done anything to a man, and he went down on his knees to me, I would——"

"What, Jenny?"

Jenny lifted her skirt an inch or two, and

showed a dainty foot swinging to and fro. "Kick him," she answered.

Nelly laughed again, and said, "And if you were a man, and a woman did so, what then?"

"Why, lift her up and kiss her, and forgive her, of course," said Jenny.

Nelly tingled with delight, and burned to ask Jenny if she should not at least let Captain Davy know that she was leaving Douglas and going home. But being a true woman, she asked something else instead.

"So you think, Jenny," she said, "that your poor friend will never go back to his wife?"

"I'm sure he won't," said Jenny. "Didn't I tell you?" she added, straightening up.

"What?" said Nelly, with a quiver of alarm.

"That he's going back to sea," said Jenny.

"To sea!" cried Nelly, dropping her needles entirely. "Back to sea?" she said, in a shrill voice. "And without even saying 'Good-bye!'"

"Good-bye to whom, my dear?" said Jenny. "To me?"

"To his wife, of course," said Nelly, huskily.

"Well, we don't know that, do we?" said Jenny. "And besides, why should he?"

"If he doesn't he's a cruel, heartless, unfeeling, unforgiving monster," said Nelly.

And then Jenny burned in her turn to ask if Nelly herself had not intended to do as much by Captain Davy, but, being a true woman as

well as her adversary, she found a crooked way to the plain question. "Is it at eleven," she said, "that the carriage is to come for you?"

Mrs. Quiggin had recovered herself in a moment, and then there was a delicate bout of thrust and parry. "I'm so sorry for your sake, Jenny," she said, in the old tone of delicious insincerity, "that the poor fellow is married."

"Gracious me! For my sake? Why?" said Jenny.

"I thought you were half in love with him, you know," said Nelly.

"Half?" cried Jenny. "I'm over head and ears in love with him."

"That's a pity," said Nelly; "for, of course, you'll give him up now that you know he has a wife."

"What of that? If he *has* a wife I have no husband—so it's as broad as it's long," said Jenny.

"Jenny!" cried Nelly.

"And, oh!" said Jenny, "there is one thing I didn't tell you. But you'll keep it secret? Promise me you'll keep it secret. I'm to meet him again by appointment this very night."

"But, Jenny!"

"Yes, in the garden of this house—by the waterfall at eight o'clock. I'll slip out after dinner in my cloak with the hood to it."

"Jenny Crow!"

"It's our last chance, it seems. The poor fellow sails at midnight, or to-morrow morning,

or to-morrow night, or the next night, or sometime. So you see he's not going away without saying good-bye to somebody. I couldn't help telling you, Nelly. It's nice to share a secret with a friend one can trust, and if he *is* another woman's husband——"

Nelly had risen to her feet with her face aflame.

"But you mustn't do it," she cried. "It's shocking, it's horrible—common morality is against it."

Jenny looked wondrous grave. "That's it, you see," she said. "Common morality always *is* against everything that's nice and agreeable."

"I'm ashamed of you, Jenny Crow. I am; indeed, I am. I could never have believed it of you; indeed, I couldn't. And the man you speak of is no better than you are, and all his talk of loving the wife is hypocrisy and deceit; and the poor woman herself should know of it, and come down on you both and shame you—indeed, she should," cried Nelly, and she flounced out of the room in a fury.

Jenny watched her go, and thought to herself, "She'll keep that appointment for me at eight o'clock to-night by the waterfall." Presently she heard Mrs. Quiggin with a servant of the hotel countermanding the order for the carriage at eleven, and engaging it instead for the extraordinary hour of nine at night. "She intends to keep it," thought Jenny.

"And now," she said, settling herself at the writing-table; "now for the *other* simpleton."

"Tell D. Q.," she wrote, addressing Lovibond; "that E. Q. goes home by carriage at nine o'clock to-night, and that you have appointed to meet her for a last farewell at eight by the waterfall in the gardens of Castle Mona. Then meet *me* on the pier at seven-thirty."

VIII

Lovibond received this message while sitting at breakfast, and he caught the idea of it in an instant. Since the supper of the night before he had been pestered by many misgivings, and troubled by some remorse. Capt'n Davy was bent on going away. Overwhelmed by a sense of what he took to be his dastardly conduct, he was in that worst position of the man who can forgive neither himself nor the person he has injured. So much had Lovibond done for him by the fine scheme that had brought matters to such a pass. But having gone so far, Lovibond had found himself at a stand. His next step he could not see. Capt'n Davy must not be allowed to leave the island, but how to keep him from going away was a bewildering difficulty. To tell him the truth was impossible, and to concoct a further fable was beyond Lovibond's invention. And so it was that when Lovibond received the letter from Jenny Crow, he rose to the cue it offered like a drowning man to a life-buoy.

"Jealousy—the very thing!" he thought; and not until he was already in the thick of his

enterprise as wizard of that passion did he realise that if it was an effectual instrument to his end it was also a cruel one.

He found Capt'n Davy in the midst of the final preparations for the journey. These consisted of the packing of clothes into trunks, bags, sacks, and hampers. On the floor of the sitting-room lay a various assortment of coats, waistcoats, trousers, great-coats, billycock hats and sou'-westers, together with countless shirts and collars, scarfs and handkerchiefs. At Davy's order Willie Quarrie had gathered up the garments in armfuls out of drawers and wardrobes, and heaped them at his feet for inspection. This process they were undergoing with a view to the selection of such as were suitable to the climate in which it was intended that they should be worn. The hour was 8.30 A.M., the *Snaefell* was announced to sail for Liverpool at nine.

But, as Lovibond entered the room, a scene of yet more primitive interest was actively proceeding. A waiter of the hotel was strutting across the floor and sputtering out protests against this unseemly use of the sitting-room. The person was the same who the night before had haunted Davy's elbow with his obsequious "Yes, sirs," "No, sirs," and "Beg pardon, sirs;" but the morning had brought him knowledge of Davy's penury, and with that wisdom had come impudence if not dignity.

"The idea!" he cried, "Turnin' a 'otel drawrin'-room into a charwoman's laundry!"

"Make it a rag-shop at once," said Davy, as he went on quietly with his work.

"A rag-shop it is, and I'll 'ave no more of it," said the waiter loftily. "Who ever 'eard of such a thing?"

"No?" said Davy. "Well, well, now! Who'd have thought it? You never did? A rael Liverpool gentleman, eh? A reg'lar aristocrack out of Sawney Pope Street!"

"No, sir, but it's easy to see where *you* came from," said the waiter, with withering scorn.

"You say true, boy," said Davy, "but it's aisier still to see where you are going to. Ever seen the black man on the beach at all? No? Him with the performing birds? You know—jacks and ravens and owls and such like. Well, he's been wanting something like you this long time. Wouldn't trust, but he'd give twopence-halfpenny for you—and drinks all round. You'd make his fortune as a cockatoo."

The waiter in fury called downstairs for assistance, and when two of his fellow-servants had arrived in the room they made some poor show of working their will by force. Then Davy paused from his work, scratched the under part of his chin with the nail of his forefinger, and said, "Friends, some of us four is interrupting the play, and they're wanting us at the pay box to give us back the fare. I'm thinking it's you's fellows—what do *you* say? They're longing

for you downstairs—won't you go? No? You'll not though? Then where d'ye keep the slack of your trowsis?"

Saying this Davy rose to his feet hitched his left hand into the collar of the first waiter, and his right into the depths under his coat tails, and ran him out of the room. Returning for the other two waiters he did the same by each of them, and then came back with a look of awe, and said—

"My gough! they must have been Manxmen after all—they rowled downstairs as if they'd been all legs together."

Lovibond looked grave. "That's going too far, Capt'n," he said, "for your own sake it's risking too much."

"Risking too much?" said Davy. "There's only three of them."

The first bell rang on the steamer; it was a quarter to nine o'clock. Willie Quarrie looked out at the window. The *Snaefell* was lying by the red pier in the harbour, getting up steam, and sending clouds of smoke over the old "Imperial." Cars were rattling up the quay, passengers were making for the gangways, and already the decks, fore and aft, were thronged with people.

"Come along, my lad; look slippy," cried Davy, "only two bells more, and three hampers still to pack. Tumble them in—here goes."

"Capt'n!" said Willie, still looking out.

"What?" said Davy.

"Don't cross by the ferry, Capt'n."

"Why not?"

"They're all waiting for you," said Willie, "every dirt of them all is waiting by the steps—here's Tommy Taubman, and Billy Balla-Slieau, and that wastrel of a churchwarden—yes, and there's ould Kennish—they're all there. Deng my buttons, all of them. They're thinking to crow over us, Capt'n. Don't cross by the ferry. Let me run for a car. Then we'll slip up by the bridge yonder, and down the quay like a mill race, and up to the gangway like smook, and abooard in a jiffy. That's it—yes, I'll be off immadient, and we'll bate the blackguards anyway."

Willie was seizing his cap to carry out his intention of going for a cab, in order that his master might be spared the humiliation of passing through the line of false friends who had gathered at the ferry steps to see the last of him; but Davy shouted "Stop," and pointed to the hampers still unpacked.

"I'm broke," said he, "and what matter who knows it? Reminds me, sir," said Davy to Lovibond, "of Parson Cowan. The ould man lived up Andreas way, and after sarvice he'd be saying, 'Boys, let's put a sight on the Methodees,' and they'd be taking a slieu round to the chapel door. Then as the people came out he'd be offering his snuff-boxes all about. 'William, how do? have a pinch?' 'Ah, Robbie, fine evening; take a sneeze?' 'Is

that yourself, Tommy? I haven't another box in my clothes, but if you'll put your finger and thumb into my waistcoat pocket here, you'll find some dust.' Aw, yes, a reg'lar up-and-a-downer, Parson Cowan, as aisy as aisy, and no pride at all. But he had his wakeness same as a common man, and it was the Plough Inn at Ramsey. One day he was going out of it middling full—not fit to walk the crank anyway—when who should be coming up the street from the coort-house but the Bishop! It was Bishop—Bishop—chut! his name's gone at me—but no matter, glum as a gurgoyle anyway, and straight as a lamp-post—a reg'lar steeple-up-your-back sort of a chap. Ould Mrs. Beatty saw him, and she lays a hould of Parson Cowan and starts a-whisking him back into the house, and through into the parlour where the chiney cups is. 'You mustn't go out yet,' the ould woman was whispering. 'It's the Bishop. And him that sevare—it's shocking! He'll surspend you! And think what they'll be saying! A parson, too! Hush, sir, hush! Don't spake! You'll be waiting till it's dark, and then going home with John in the bottom of the cart, and nice clane straw to lie on, and nobody knowing nothing.' But the ould man wouldn't listen. He drew hisself up on the ould woman tremenjous, and studdied hisself agen the door, and 'No,' says he; 'I'm drunk,' says he, '*God* knows it,' says he, 'and for what man knows I don't care a damn—*I'll walk!*' Then away

he went down the street past the Bishop, with his hat a-one side, and his hair all through-others, tacking a bit with romps in the fetlock joints, but driving on like mad."

The second bell rang on the steamer, It was seven minutes to nine, and the last of the luggage was packed. On the floor there still lay a pile of clothing, which was to be left as oil for the wounded joints of the gentlemen who had been flung downstairs. Willie Quarrie bustled about to get the trunks and hampers to the ferry steps. Davy, who had been in his shirt-sleeves, drew on his coat, and Lovibond, who had been waiting twenty torturing minutes for some opportunity to begin, plunged into the business of his visit at last.

"So you're determined to go, Capt'n?" he said.

"I am," said Davy.

"No message for Mrs. Quiggin? Daresay I could find her at Castle Mona."

"No. Wait—yes—tell her—say I'm—if ever I—Chut! what's the odds? No, no message."

"Not even good-bye, Capt'n?"

"She sent none to me—no."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word."

Davy was pawing up the carpet with the toe of his boot, and filling his pipe from his pouch.

"Going back to Callao, Capt'n?" said Lovibond.

"God knows, mate," said Davy. "I'm like the seeding grass, blown here and there, and the Lord knows where; but maybe I'll find land at last."

"Capt'n, about the money—d'ye owe me any grudge about that?" said Lovibond.

"Lord-a-massy! Grudge, is it?" said Davy. "Aw, no, man, no. The money was my mischief. It's gone, and good luck to it."

"But if I could show you a way to get it all back again, Capt'n——"

"Chut! I wouldn't have it, and I wouldn't stay. But, matey, if you could show me how to get back . . . the money isn't the loss I'm . . . if I was as poor as ould Chalse-a-Killey, and had to work my flesh . . . . I'd stay if I could get back . . ."

The whistle sounded from the funnel of the *Snaefell*, and the loud throbs of escaping steam echoed from the Head. Willie Quarrie ran in to say that the luggage was down at the ferry steps, and the ferry-boat was coming over the harbour.

"Capt'n," said Lovibond, "she must have injured you badly——"

"Injured *me?*" said Davy. "Wish she had! I wouldn't go off to the world's end if that was all betwixt us."

"If she hasn't, Capt'n," said Lovibond, "you're putting her in the way of it."

"What?"

Davy was about to light his pipe, but he flung away the match.

"Have you never thought of it?" said Lovibond. "That when a husband deserts his wife like this he throws her in the way of——"

"Not Nelly, no," said Davy, promptly. "I'll lave *that* with her, anyway. Any other woman perhaps, but Nelly—never! She's as pure as new milk, and no beast milk neither. Nelly going wrong, eh? Well, well! I'd like to see the man that would . . . I may have treated her bad . . . but I'd like to see the man, I say . . . ."

Then there was another shrieking whistle from the steamer. Willie Quarrie called up at the window and gesticulated wildly from the lawn outside.

"Coming, boy, coming," Davy shouted back, and looking at his watch, he said, "four minutes and a half—time enough yet."

Then they left the hotel and moved towards the ferry steps. As they walked Davy began to laugh. "Well, well!" he said, and he laughed again. "Aw, to think, to think!" he said, and he laughed once more. But with every fresh outbreak of his laughter the note of his voice lost freshness.

Lovibond saw his opportunity, and yet could not lay hold of it, so cruel at that moment seemed the only weapon that would be effectual. But Davy himself thrust in between

him and his timid spirit. With another hollow laugh, as if half ashamed of keeping up the deception to the last, yet convinced that he alone could see through it, he said, "No news of the girl in the church, mate, eh? Gone home, I suppose?"

"Not yet," said Lovibond.

"No?" said Davy.

"The fact is—but you'll be secret?"

"Coorse."

"It isn't a thing I'd tell everybody——"

"What?"

"You see, if her husband has treated her like a brute, she's his wife after all."

Davy drew up on the path. "What is it?" he said.

"I'm to meet her to-night, alone," said Lovibond.

"No!"

"Yes; in the grounds of Castle Mona, by the waterfall, after dark—at eight o'clock, in fact."

"Castle Mona—by the waterfall—eight o'clock—that's a—now, that must be a——"

Davy had lifted his pipe hand to give emphasis to the protest on his lips, when he stopped and laughed, and said, "Amazing thick, eh?"

"Why not?" said Lovibond. "Who wouldn't be—with a sweet woman like that? If the fool that's left her doesn't know her worth, so much the better for somebody else."

"Then you're for making it up there?" said Davy, clearing his throat.

"It'll not be my fault if I don't," said Lovibond. "I'm not one of the wise asses that talk big about God's law and man's law; and if I were, man's law has tied this sweet little woman to a brute, and God's law draws her to me—that's all."

"And she's willing, eh?" said Davy.

"Give her time, Capt'n," said Lovibond.

"But didn't you say she was loving this—this brute of a husband?" said Davy.

"Time, Capt'n, time," said Lovibond. "That will mend with time."

"And, manewhile, she's telling you all her sacrets."

"I leave you to judge, Capt'n."

"After dark, you say—that's middling tidy to begin with, eh, mate—eh?"

Lovibond laughed; Capt'n Davy laughed They laughed together.

Willie Quarrie, standing by the boat at the bottom of the steps, with the luggage piled up at the bow, shouted that there was not a minute to spare. The throbbing of the steam in the funnel had ceased, one of the two gangways had been run ashore, and the captain was on the bridge.

"Now, then, Capt'n," cried Willie.

But Davy did not hear. He was watching Lovibond's face with eyes of suspicion. Was

the man fooling him? Did he know the secret?

"Good-bye, Capt'n," said Lovibond, taking Davy by the hand.

"Good-bye, mate," said Davy, absently. "I must be seeing herself," he thought, "this is sarious."

"Good luck to you and a second fortune," said Lovibond.

"Damn the fortune," said Davy, under his breath. "The man's anxious to get quit of me," he thought, "but I'll see herself, though, yes will I, then, before I stir a foot."

There was another whistle from the *Snaefell*.

"Capt'n Davy! Capt'n Davy!" cried Willie Quarrie.

"Coming," answered Davy. But still he stood at the top of the ferry steps, holding Lovibond's hand, and looking into his face.

Then there came a loud voice from the bridge of the steamer—"Steam up!"

"Capt'n! Capt'n!" cried Willie from the bottom of the steps.

Davy dropped Lovibond's hand, and turned to look across the harbour. "Too late," he said, quietly.

"Not if you'll come quick, Capt'n. See, the last gangway is up yet," cried Willie.

"Too late," repeated Davy, more loudly.

"Just time to do it by the skin of your teeth, Capt'n," shouted the ferryman.

"Too late, I tell you," thundered Davy sternly.

Meanwhile, there was a great commotion on the other side of the harbour.

"Out of the way there!" "All ashore!" "Ready?" "Ready!" "Steam up—slow!" The last bell rang. The first stroke of nine was struck by the clock of the tower; one echoing blast came from the steam whistle, and the *Snaefell* began to move slowly from the quay. Then there were shouts from the deck and adieus from the shore. "Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" "Farewell, little Mona!" "Good-bye, dear Ellan Vannin!" Handkerchiefs waving on the steamer; handkerchiefs waving on the quay; seagulls wheeling over the stern; white churning water in the wake; flag down; and harbour empty.

"She's gone!"

Lovibond smiled behind a handkerchief, with which he pretended to wipe his big moustache. Willie Quarrie looked helplessly up the ferry steps. Davy gnashed his teeth at the top of them.

After a moment Davy said, "No matter; we can take the Irish pacquet at nine, and catch the Pacific boat at Belfast." "Willie," he shouted, "put the luggage in the shed for the Belfast steamer. We'll sail to-night instead."

Then the three parted company, each with his own reflections.

"The Capt'n done that a-purpose," thought Willie.

"He'll keep my engagement for me at eight o'clock," thought Lovibond.

"I wouldn't have believed it of her if the Dempster himself had swore to it," thought Davy.

IX

At half-past seven that night the iron pier was a varied and animated scene. A band was playing a waltz on the circle at the end; young people were dancing, other young people of both sexes were promenading, lines of yet younger people, chiefly girls in short frocks, but with the wagging heads and sparkling eyes of one type of budding maidenhood, were skipping along arm-in-arm, singing snatches of the words set to the waltz, and beating a half-dancing time with an alternate scrape and stroke of the soles of their shoes upon the wooden floor on which they walked. The odour of the brine came up from below and mingled with the whiffs of Mona Bouquet that swept after the young girls as they passed, and with the puffs of tobacco smoke that enveloped the young men as they dawdled on. Sometimes the revolving light of the lightship in the Channel could be seen above the flash and flare of the pier lamps, and sometimes the dark water under foot glowed and glinted between the open timbers of the pier pavement, and sometimes the deep rumble of the sea could be heard over the clash and clang of the pier band.

Lovibond was there, walking to and fro, feeling himself for the first time to be an old fellow among so many younger folks, watching the clock, counting the minutes, and scanning every female form that came alone with the crink-crank-crick through the round stile of the pay-gate. Not until five minutes to eight did the right one appear, but she made up for the tardiness of her coming by the animation of her spirits.

"I couldn't get away sooner," whispered Jenny. "She watched me like a cat. She'll be out in the grounds by this time. It's delicious! But is he coming?"

"Trust him," said Lovibond.

"Oh dear, what a meeting it will be!" said Jenny.

"I'd love to be there," said Lovibond.

"Umph! Would you? Two's company, three's none—you're just as well where you are," said Jenny.

"Better," said Lovibond.

The clock struck eight in the tower.

"Eight o'clock," said Lovibond. "They'll be flying at each other's eyes by this time."

"Eight o'clock, twenty seconds!" said Jenny. "And they'll be lying in each other's arms by now."

"Did she suspect?" said Lovibond.

"Of course she did!" said Jenny. "Did he?"

"Certainly!" said Lovibond.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Jenny. "It's wonderful how far you can fool people when it's to their interest to be fooled."

"Wonderful!" said Lovibond.

"They had walked to the end of the pier where the band was playing—

"Ben-my-chree!
Sweet Ben-my-chree,
I love but thee sweet Mona."

"So our little drama is over, eh?" said Jenny.

"Yes; it's over," said Lovibond.

Jenny sighed; Lovibond sighed; they looked at each other and sighed together.

"And these good people have no further use for us?" said Jenny.

"None," said Lovibond.

"Then I suppose we've no further use for each other?" moaned Jenny.

"Eh?" said Lovibond.

"Tut!" said Jenny, and she swung aside.

"Mona, sweet Mona,
I love but thee, sweet Mona."

"There's only one thing I regret," said Lovibond, inclining his head towards Jenny's averted face.

"And pray what's that?" said Jenny, without turning about.

"Didn't I tell you that Capt'n Davy had taken two berths in the Pacific steamer to the west coast?" said Lovibond.

"Well?" said Jenny.

"That's ninety pounds wasted," said Lovibond.

"*What* a pity!" sighed Jenny.

"Isn't it?" said Lovibond—his left hand was fumbling for her right.

"If she were any other woman, she might be glad to go still," said Jenny.

"And if he were any other man he would be proud to take her," said Lovibond.

"Some woman without kith or kin to miss her——" began Jenny.

"Yes, or some man without anybody in the world——" began Lovibond.

"Now, if it had been *my* case——" said Jenny, wearily.

"Or mine," said Lovibond, sadly.

Each drew a long breath.

"Do you know, if I disappeared to-night, there's not a soul——" said Jenny, sorrowfully.

"That's just my case, too," interrupted Lovibond.

"Ah!" they said together.

They looked into each other's eyes with a mournful expression, and sighed again. Also their hands touched as their arms hung by their sides.

"Ninety pound! Did you say ninety? Two berths?" said Jenny. "What a shocking waste! Couldn't somebody else use them?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Lovibond; and he linked the lady's arm through his own.

"Hadn't you better get the tickets from Capt'n Davy, and—and give them to somebody before it is too late?" said Jenny.

"I've got them already—his boy Quarrie was keeping them," said Lovibond.

"How thoughtful of you, Jona—I mean, Mr. Lovi——"

"Je—Jen——"

> "Ben-my-chree!
> Sweet Ben-my-chree,
> I love but thee——"

"Oh, Jonathan!" whispered Jenny.

"Oh, Jenny!" gasped Jonathan.

They were on the dark side of the round house; the band was playing behind them, the sea was rumbling in front; there was a shuffle of feet, a sudden rustle of a dress; the lady glanced to the right, the gentleman looked to the left, and then for a fraction of an instant they were locked in each other's arms.

"Will you go back with me, Jenny?"

"Well," whispered Jenny, "just to keep the tickets from wasting——"

"Just that," whispered Lovibond.

Three-quarters of an hour later they were sailing out of Douglas harbour on board the Irish pacquet that was to overtake the Pacific steamship next morning at Belfast. The lights of Castle Mona lay low on the water's edge,

and from the iron pier as they passed came the faint sound of the music of the band :

"Mona, sweet Mona,
Fairest isle beneath the sky,
Mona, sweet Mona,
We bid a long good-bye."

X

The life that Davy had led that day was infernal. At the first shaft of Lovibond's insinuation against Mrs. Quiggin's fidelity he had turned sick at heart. "When he said it," Davy had thought, "the blood went from me like the tide out of the Ragged Mouth, where the ships lies wrecked and rotten."

He had battled with his bemuddled brain, to recall the conversation he had held with his wife since his return home to marry her, and every innocent word she had uttered in jest had seemed guilty and foul. "You've been nothing but a fool, Davy," he told himself. "You've been tooken in."

Then he had reproached himself for his hasty judgment. "Hould hard, boy, hould hard; aisy for all, though, aisy, aisy!" He had remembered how modest his wife had been in the old days—how simple and how natural. "She was as pure as the mountain turf," he had thought, "and quiet extraordinary." Yet there was the ugly fact that she had appointed to meet a strange man in the gardens of Castle Mona, that night, alone. "Some charm is put on her, though—

some charm or the like," he had thought again.

That had been the utmost and best he could make of it, and he had suffered the torments of the damned. During the earlier part of the day he had rambled through the town, drinking freely, and his face had been a piteous sight to see. Towards nightfall he had drifted past Castle Mona towards Onchan Head, and stretched himself on the beach before Derby Castle. There he had reviewed the case afresh, and asked himself what he ought to do.

"It's not for me to go sneaking after her," he had thought. "She's true, I'll swear to it. The man's lying. . . . . Very well, then, Davy, boy, don't you take rest till you're proving it."

The autumn day had begun to close in, and the first stars to come out. "Other women are like yonder," he had thought; "just common stars in the sky, where there's millions and millions of them. But Nelly is like the moon —the moon, bless her——"

At that thought Davy had leapt to his feet, in disgust of his own simplicity. "I'm a fool," he had muttered, "a reg'lar ould bleating billy-goat; talking pieces of poethry to myself, like a stupid, gawky Tommy Big Eyes."

He had looked at his watch. It was a quarter to eight o'clock. Unconsciously he had begun to walk towards Castle Mona. "I'm not for misdoubting my wife, though, not me; but then a man may be over certain. I'll find

out for myself; and if it's true, if she's there, if she meets him. . . . Well, well, be aisy for all, Davy; be aisy, boy, be aisy! If the worst comes to the worst, and you've got to cut your stick, you'll be doing it without a heart-ache anyway. She'll not be worth it, and you'll be selling yourself to the Divil with a clane conscience. So it's all serene either way, Davy, my man, and here goes for it."

Meanwhile Mrs. Quiggin had been going through similar torments. "I don't blame *him*," she had thought. "It's that mischief-making hussy. Why did I ask her? I wonder what in the world I ever saw in her. If I were not going away myself she should pick out of the house in the morning. The sly thing! How clever she thinks herself, too! But she'll be surprised when I come down on her. I'll watch her; she sha'n't escape me. And as for *him* — well, we'll see, Mr. David, we'll see!"

As the clock in the hall in Castle Mona was striking eight these good souls in these wise humours were making their several ways to the waterfall under the cliff, in the darkest part of the hotel grounds.

Davy got there first, going in by the gate at the Onchan end. It struck him with astonishment that Lovibond was not there already. "The man bragged of coming, but I don't see him," he thought. He felt half inclined to be wroth with Lovibond for daring to run the risk

of being late. "I know some one who would have been early enough if he had been coming to meet with somebody," he thought.

Presently he saw a female form approaching from the thick darkness at the Douglas end of the house. It was a tall figure in a long cloak, with the hood drawn over the head. Through the opening of the cloak in front a light dress beneath gleamed and glinted in the brightening starlight. "It's herself," Davy muttered, under his breath. "She's like the silvery fir tree with her little dark head agen the sky. Trust me for knowing her! I'd be doing that if I was blind. Yes, would I though, if I was only the grass under her feet, and she walked on me. She's coming! My God, then, it's true! It's true, Davy! Hould hard, boy! She's a woman for all! She's here! She sees me! She thinks I'm the man!"

In the strange mood of the moment he was half sorry to take her by surprise.

Davy was right that Mrs. Quiggin saw him. While still in the shadow of the house she recognised his dark figure among the trees. "But he's alone," she thought. "Then the hussy must have gone back to her room when I thought she slipped out at the porch. He's waiting for her. Should I wait, too? No! That he is there is enough. He sees me. He is coming. He thinks I am she. Umph! Now to astonish him!"

Thus thinking, and both trembling with rage

and indignation, and both quivering with love and fear, the two came face to face.

But neither betrayed the least surprise.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, if I'm not the man——" faltered Davy.

"It's a pity, sir, if I'm not the woman——" stammered Nelly.

"Hope I don't interrup any tertertatie," continued Davy.

"I trust you won't allow *me*——" began Nelly.

And then, having launched these shafts of impotent irony in vain, they came to a stand with an uneasy feeling that something unlooked for was amiss.

"What d'ye mane, ma'am?" said Davy.

"What do *you* mean, sir?" said Nelly.

"I mane, that you're here to meet with a man," said Davy.

"I!" cried Nelly. "I? Did you say that I was here to meet——"

"Don't go to deny it, ma'am," said Davy.

"I do deny it," said Nelly. "And what's more, sir, I know why you are here. You are here to meet with a woman."

"Me! To meet with a woman! Me?" cried Davy.

"Oh, *you* needn't deny it sir," said Nelly. "Your presence here is proof enough against you."

"And *your* presence here is proof enough agen *you*," said Davy.

"You had to meet her at eight," said Nelly.

"That's a reg'lar bluff, ma'am," said Davy, "for it was at eight you had to meet with *him*."

"How dare you say so?" cried Nelly.

"I had it from the man himself," said Davy.

"It's false, sir, for there *is* no man; but I had it from the woman," said Nelly.

"And did you believe her?" said Davy.

"Did *you* believe *him?*" said Nelly. "Were you simple enough to trust a man who told you that he was going to meet your own wife?"

"He wasn't for knowing it was my own wife," said Davy. "But were *you* simple enough to trust the woman who was telling you she was going to meet your own husband?"

"She didn't know it was my own husband," said Nelly. "But that wasn't the only thing she told me."

"And it wasn't the only thing *he* tould *me*," said Davy. "He tould me all your sacrets—that your husband had deserted you because he was a brute and a blackguard."

"I have never said so," cried Nelly. "Who dares to say I have? I have never opened my lips to any living man against you. But you are measuring me by your own yard, sir; for you led *her* to believe that I was a cat and a shrew and a nagger, and a thankless wretch who ought to be put down by the law just as it puts down biting dogs."

"Now, begging your pardon, ma'am," said

Davy in a hushed whisper of wrath; "but that's a damned lie, though, who ever made it."

After this burst there was a pause and a hush, and then Nelly said, "It's easy to say that when she isn't here to contradict you; but wait, sir only wait."

"And it's aisy for you to say yonder," said Davy, "when he isn't come to deny it—but take your time, ma'am, take your time."

"Who is it?" said Nelly.

"No matter," said Davy.

"Who is the man?" demanded Nelly.

"My friend Lovibond," answered Davy.

"Lovibond!" cried Nelly.

"The same," groaned Davy.

"Mr. Lovibond!" cried Nelly again.

"Aw—keep it up, ma'am; keep it up!" said Davy. "And, manewhile, if you plaze, who is the woman?"

"My friend Jenny Crow," said Nelly.

Then there was another pause.

"And did she tell you that I had agreed to meet her?" said Davy.

"She did," said Nelly. "And did *he* tell *you* that I had appointed to meet *him?*"

"Yes, did he, though," said Davy. "At eight o'clock, did she say?"

"Yes, eight o'clock," said Nelly. "Did *he* say eight?"

"He did," said Davy.

The loud voices of a moment before had

suddenly dropped to broken whispers. Davy made a prolonged whistle.

"Stop," said he; "haven't you been in the habit of meeting him?"

"I have never seen him but once," said Nelly. "But haven't *you* been in the habit of meeting *her?*"

"Never set eyes on the little skute but twice altogether," said Davy. "But didn't he see you first in St. Thomas's, and didn't you speak with him on the shore——"

"I've never been in St. Thomas s in my life!" said Nelly. "But didn't you meet her first on the Head above Port Soderick, and go to Laxey, and come home with her in the coach?"

"Not I," said Davy.

"Then the stories she told me of the Manx sailor were all imagination, were they?" said Nelly.

"And the yarns *he* tould *me* of the girl in the church were all make-ups, eh?" said Davy.

"Dear me, what a pair of deceitful people!" said Nelly.

"My gough! what a couple of cuffers!" said Davy.

There was another pause, and then Davy began to laugh. First came a low gurgle like that of suppressed bubbles in a fountain, then a sharp, crackling breaker of sound, and then a long, deep roar of liberated mirth that seemed to shake and heave the whole man, and to convulse the very air around him.

Davy's laughter was contagious. As the truth began to dawn on her, Mrs. Quiggin first chuckled, then tittered, then laughed outright; and at last, her voice rose behind her husband's in clear trills of uncontrollable merriment.

Laughter was the good genie that drew their asundered hearts together. It broke down the barrier that divided them; it melted the frozen places where love might not pass. They could not resist it. Their anger fled before it like evil creatures of the night.

At the first sound of Davy's laughter something in Nelly's bosom seemed to whisper, "He loves me still;" and at the first note of Nelly's, something clamoured in Davy's breast, "She's mine, she's mine!" They turned towards each other in the darkness with a yearning cry.

"Nelly!" cried Davy, and he opened his arms to her.

"Davy!" cried Nelly, and she leaped to his embrace.

And so ended in laughter and kisses their little foolish comedy of love.

As soon as Davy had recovered his breath, he said, with what gravity he could command, "Seems to me, Nelly vauch, begging your pardon, darling, that we've been a couple of fools."

"Whoever could have believed it though?" said Nelly.

"What does it mane at all?" said Davy.

"It manes," said Nelly, "that our good friends

knew each other, and that he tould her, and she tould him, and that to bring us together again, they just played a trick on our jealousy."

"Then we *were* jealous?" said Davy.

"Why else are we here?" said Nelly.

"So you *did* come to see a man, after all, Nelly vauch?" said Davy.

"And *you* came to see a woman, Davy boy," said Nelly.

They had begun to laugh again, and to walk to and fro about the lawn, arm-in-arm and waist-to-waist, vowing that they would never part—no, never, never, never—and that nothing on earth should separate them, when they heard a step on the grass behind.

"Who's there?" said Davy.

And a voice from the darkness answered, "It's Willie Quarrie, Capt'n."

Davy caught his breath. "Lord-a-massy me!" said he. "I'd clane forgot."

"So had I," said Nelly, with alarm.

"I was to have started back for Callao by the Belfast pacquet."

"And I was to have gone home by carriage."

"If you plaze, Capt'n," said Willie Quarrie, coming up. "I've been looking for you high and low—the pacquet's gone."

Davy drew a long breath of relief. "Good luck to her," said he, with a shout.

"And, if you plaze," said Willie, "Mr. Lovibond is gone with her."

"Good luck to *him*," said Davy.

"And Miss Crows has gone, too," said Willie.

"Good luck to her as well," said Davy; and Nelly whispered at his side, "There—what did I tell you though?"

"And if you plaze, Capt'n," said Willie Quarrie, stammering nervously, "Mr. Lovibond, sir, he has borrowed our—our tickets and—and taken them away with him."

"He's welcome, boy, he's welcome," cried Davy, promptly. "We're going home instead. Home!" he said again—this time to Nelly, and in a tone of delight, as if the word rolled on his tongue like a lozenge—"that sounds better, doesn't it? Middling tidy, isn't it? Not so dusty, eh?"

"We'll never lave it again," said Nelly.

"Never!" said Davy. "Not for a Dempster's palace. Just a piece of a croft and a bit of a thatch cottage on the lea of ould Orrisdale, and we'll lie ashore and take the sun like the goats."

"That reminds me of something," whispered Nelly. "Listen! I've had a letter from father. It made me cry this morning, but it's all right now—Ballamooar is to let!"

"Ballamooar!" repeated Davy, but in another voice. "Aw, no, woman, no! And that reminds *me* of something."

"What is it?" said Nelly.

"I should have been telling you first," said

Davy, with downcast head, and in a tone of humiliation.

"Then what?" whispered Nelly.

"There's never no money at a dirty ould swiper that drinks and gambles everything. I'm on the ebby tide, Nelly, and my boat is on the rocks like a tay-pot. I'm broke, woman, I'm broke."

Nelly laughed lightly. "Do you say so now?" she said with mock solemnity.

"It's only an ould shirt I'm bringing you to patch, Nelly," said Davy; "but here I am, what's left of me, to take me or lave me, and not much choice either ways."

"Then I take you, sir," said Nelly, "and as for the money," she whispered in a meaning voice, "I'll take Ballamooar myself and be after giving you trust."

With a cry of joy Davy caught her to his breast and held her there as in a vice. "Then kiss me on it again and swear to it," he cried. "Again! Again! Don't be in a hurry, woman! Aw, kissing is mortal hasty work! Take your time, girl! Once more! Shocking, is it? It's like the bags of the bees that we were stealing when we were boys! Another! Then half a one, and I'm done!"

Since they had spoken to Willie Quarrie they had given no further thought to him, and now he stepped forward and said out of the darkness, "If you plaze, Capt'n, Mr. Lovibond was telling me to give you this letter and

this other thing," giving a letter and a book to Davy.

"Hould hard, though; what's doing now?" said Davy, turning them over in his hand.

"Let us go into the house and look," said Nelly.

But Davy had brought out his match-box, and was striking a light. "Hould up my billy-cock, boy," said he; and in another moment Willie Quarrie was holding Davy's hat on end to shield from the breeze the burning match which Nelly held inside of it. Then Davy, bareheaded, proceeded to examine what Lovibond had sent him.

"A book tied up in a red tape, eh?" said Davy. "Looks like the one he was writing in constant, morning and evening, telling hisself and God A'mighty what he was doing and wasn't doing, and where he was going to, and when he was going to go. Aw, yes, he always kep' a diarrhea."

"A diary, Davy," said Nelly.

"Have it as you like, *bauch*, and don't burn your little fingers," said Davy, and then he opened the letter, and with many interjections proceeded to read it.

"DEAR CAPTAIN,—How can I ask you to forgive me for the trick I have played upon you?" (Forgive, is it?) "I have never had an appointment with the Manx lady; I have never had an intention of carrying her off from her husband; I have never seen her in church, and

the story I have told you has been a lie from beginning to end."

Davy lifted his head and laughed. "Another match, Willie," he cried. And while the boy was striking a fresh one Davy stamped out the burning end that Nelly dropped on to the grass, and said, "A lie! Well, it was an' it wasn't. A sort of a scriptural parable, eh?"

"Go on, Davy," said Nelly impatiently, and Davy began again.

"You know the object of that trick by this time"—(wouldn't trust)—"but you have been the victim of another"—(holy sailor!)—"to which I must also confess. In the gambling by which I won a large part of your money"—(true for you!)—"I was not playing for my own hand. It was for one who wished to save you from yourself"—(Lord-a-massy!). "That person was your wife"—(Goodness me!)—"and all my earnings belong to her"—(Good thing, too!) "They are deposited at Dumbell's in her name"—(Right!)—"and——"

"There—that will do," said Nelly, nervously.

"—— and I send you the bank-book, together with the dock bonds . . . . which you transferred for Mrs. Quiggin's benefit . . . . to the name . . . of her friend . . .'

Davy's lusty voice died off to a whisper.

"What is that?" said Nelly eagerly.

"Nothin'," said Davy, very thick about the throat; and he rammed the letter into his

breeches pocket and grabbed at his hat. As he did so a paper slipped to the ground. Nelly caught it up and held it on the breezy side of the flickering match.

It was a note from Jenny Crow; "You dear old goosie; your jealous little heart found out who the Manx sailor was, but your wise little poll never once suspected that Mr. Lovibond could be anything to anybody, although I must have told you twenty times in the old days of the sweetheart from whom I parted. Good thing too. Glad you were so stupid, my dear, for by helping you to make up your quarrel we have contrived to patch up our own. Good-bye! What lovely stories I told you! And how you liked them! We have borrowed your husband's berths for the Pacific steamer, and are going to have an Irish marriage to-morrow morning at Belfast."

"So they're a Co. consarn already," said Davy.

——"Good-bye! Give your Manx sailor one kiss for me——"

"Do it," cried Davy. "Do it! What you've got to do only once you ought to do it well."

Then they became aware that a smaller and dumpier figure was standing in the darkness by the side of Willie. It was Peggy Quine.

"Are you longing, Peggy?" Willie was saying in a voice of melancholy sympathy.

And Peggy was answering in a doleful tone, "Aw, yes, though—longing mortal."

Becoming conscious that the eyes of her mistress were on her, Peggy stepped out and said, "If you plaze, ma'am, the carriage is waiting this half-hour."

"Then send it away again," said Davy.

"But the boxes is packed, sir——"

"Send it away," repeated Davy.

"No, no," said Nelly; "we must go home to-night."

"To-morrow morning," shouted Davy, with a stamp of his foot and a laugh.

"But I have paid the bill," said Nelly, "and everything is arranged, and we are all ready."

"To-morrow morning," thundered Davy, with another stamp of the foot and a peal of laughter.

And Davy had his way.

THE LAST CONFESSION

THE LAST CONFESSION

I

FATHER, do not leave me. Wait! only a little longer. You cannot absolve me? I am not penitent? How *can* I be penitent? I do not regret it? How *can* I regret it? I would do it again? How could I help *but* do it again?

Yes, yes, I know, I know! Who knows it so well as I? It is written in the tables of God's law: *Thou shalt do no murder!* But was it murder? Was it crime? Blood? Yes, it was the spilling of blood. Blood will have blood, you say. But is there no difference? Hear me out. Let me speak. It is hard to remember all now—and here—lying here—but listen—only listen. Then tell me if I did wrong. No, tell me if God himself will not justify me—ay, justify me—though I outraged His edict. Blasphemy? Ah, Father, do not go! Father!——

(*Speak, my son. I will listen. It is my duty. Speak.*)

It is less than a year since my health broke

down, but the soul lives fast, and it seems to me like a lifetime. I had overworked myself miserably. My life as a physician in London had been a hard one, but it was not my practice that had wrecked me. How to perform that operation on the throat was the beginning of my trouble. You know what happened. I mastered my problem, and they called the operation by my name. It has brought me fame; it has made me rich; it has saved a hundred lives, and will save ten thousand more, and yet I—I—for taking one life—one—under conditions——

Father, bear with me. I will tell all. My nerves are burnt out. Gloom, depression, sleeplessness, prostration, sometimes collapse, a consuming fire within, a paralysing frost without—you know what it is—we call it neurasthenia.

I watched the progress of my disease and gave myself the customary treatment. Hygiene, diet, drugs, electricity, I tried them all. But neither dumb-bells nor Indian clubs, neither walking nor riding, neither liberal food nor doses of egg and brandy, neither musk nor ergot nor antipyrin, neither faradisation nor galvanisation availed to lift the black shades that hung over me day and night, and made the gift of life a mockery. I knew why. My work possessed me like a fever. I could neither do it to my content nor leave it undone. I was drawing water in a sieve.

My wife sent for Gull. Full well I knew what he would advise. It was rest. I must take six months' absolute holiday, and, in order to cut myself off entirely from all temptations to mental activity, I must leave London and go abroad. Change of scene, of life, and of habit, new peoples, new customs, new faiths, and a new climate—these separately and together, with total cessation of my usual occupations, were to banish a long series of functional derangements which had for their basis the exhaustion of the sympathetic nervous system.

I was loth to go. Looking back upon my condition, I see that my reluctance was justified. To launch a creature who was all nerves into the perpetual, if trifling, vexations of travel was a mistake, a folly, a madness. But I did not perceive this; I was thinking only of my home and the dear souls from whom I must be separated. During the seven years of our married life my wife had grown to be more than the object of my love. That gentle soothing, that soft healing which the mere presence of an affectionate woman, who is all strength and courage, may bring to a man who is wasted by work or worry, my wife's presence had long brought to me, and I shrank from the thought of scenes where she could no longer move about me, meeting my wishes and anticipating my wants.

This was weakness, and I knew it: but I had another weakness which I did not know.

My boy, a little son six years of age the day before I set sail, was all the world to me. Paternal love may eat up all the other passions. It was so in my case. The tyranny of my affection for my only child was even more constant and unrelenting than the tyranny of my work. Nay, the two were one: for out of my instinct as a father came my strength as a doctor. The boy had suffered a throat trouble from his birth. When he was a babe I delivered him from a fierce attack of it, and when he was four I brought him back from the jaws of death. Thus twice I had saved his life, and each time that life had become dearer to me. But too well I knew that the mischief was beaten down, and not conquered. Some day it would return with awful virulence. To meet that terror I wrought by day and night. No slave ever toiled so hard. I denied myself rest, curtailed my sleep, and stole from tranquil reflection and repose half-hours and quarter-hours spent in the carriage going from patient to patient. The attack might come suddenly, and I must be prepared. I was working against time.

You know what happened. The attack did not come; my boy continued well, but my name became known and my discovery established. The weakness of my own child had given the bent to my studies. If I had mastered my subject it was my absorbing love of my little one that gave me the impulse and direction.

But I had paid my penalty. My health was a wreck, and I must leave everything behind me. If it had been possible to take my wife and boy along with me, how different the end might have been! Should I be lying here now—here on this bed—with you, father, you?——

We spent our boy's birthday with what cheer we could command. For my wife it seemed to be a day of quiet happiness, hallowed by precious memories—the dearest and most delicious that a mother ever knew—of the babyhood of her boy—his pretty lisp, his foolish prattle, his funny little ways and sayings—and sweetened by the anticipation of the health that was to return to me as the result of rest and change. The child himself was bright and gamesome, and I, for my part, gave way to some reckless and noisy jollity.

Thus the hours passed until bedtime, and then, as I saw the little fellow tucked up in his crib, it crossed my mind for a moment that he looked less well than usual. Such fancies were common to me, and I knew from long experience that it was folly to give way to them. To do so at that time must have been weakness too pitiful for my manhood. I had already gone far enough for my own self-respect. To my old colleague and fellow-student, Granville Wenman, I had given elaborate instructions for all possible contingencies.

If *this* happened he was to do *that;* if *that*

happened he was to do *this*. In case of serious need he was to communicate with me by the swiftest means available, for neither the width of the earth nor the wealth of the world, nor the loss of all chances of health or yet life, should keep me from hastening home if the one hope of my heart was in peril. Wenman had smiled a little as if in pity of the morbidity that ran out to meet so many dangers. I did not heed his good-natured compassion or contempt, whatever it was, for I knew he had no children. I had reconciled myself in some measure to my absence from home, and before my little man was awake in the morning I was gone from the house.

It had been arranged that I should go to Morocco. Wenman had suggested that country out of regard to the freshness of its life and people. The East in the West, the costumes of Arabia, the faiths of Mohammed and of Moses, a primitive form of government, and a social life that might have been proper to the land of Canaan in the days of Abraham—such had seemed to him and others to be an atmosphere of novelty that was likely to bring spring and elasticity to the overstretched mind and nerves of a victim of the civilisation of our tumultuous century. But not in all the world could fate have ferreted out for me a scene more certain to develop the fever and fret of my natural temperament. Had the choice fallen on any other place, any dead or dying

country any corner of God's earth but that blighted and desolate land——

Ah! bear with me, bear with me.

(*I know it, my son. It is near to my own country. My home is in Spain. I came to your England from Seville. Go on.*)

I sailed to Gibraltar by a P. and O. steamer from Tilbury, and the tender that took my wife back to the railway-pier left little in my new condition to interest me. You know what it is to leave home in search of health. If hope is before you, regret is behind. When I stood on the upper deck that night, alone, and watched the light of the Eddystone dying down over the dark waters, it seemed to me that success had no solace, and fame no balm, and riches no safety or content. One reflection alone sufficed to reconcile me to where I was—the work that had brought me there was done neither for fame nor for riches, but at the prompting of the best of all earthly passions—or what seemed to be the best.

Three days passed, and beyond casual words I had spoken to no one on the ship. But on the fourth day, as we sailed within sight of Finisterre in a calm sea, having crossed the Bay with comfort, the word went round that a storm-signal was hoisted on the cape. No one who has gone through an experience such as that is likely to forget it. Everybody on deck, the blanched faces, the hushed voices, the quick

whispers, the eager glances around, the interrogations of the officers on duty, and their bantering answers belied by their anxious looks, then the darkening sky, the freshening breeze, the lowering horizon, the tingling gloomy atmosphere creeping down from the mast-heads, and the air of the whole ship, above and below, charged, as it were, with sudden electricity. It is like nothing else in life except the bugle-call in camp, telling those who lie smoking and drinking about the fires that the enemy is coming, and is near.

I was standing on the quarter-deck watching the Lascars reefing sails, battening down the hatches, tarpauling them, and making everything snug, when a fellow-passenger whom I had not observed before stepped up and spoke. His remark was a casual one, and it has gone from my memory. I think it had reference to the native seamen, and was meant as a jest upon their lumbering slowness, which suggested pitiful thoughts to him of what their capacity must be in a storm. But the air of the man much more than his words aroused and arrested my attention. It was that of one whose spirits had been quickened by the new sense of danger. He laughed, his eyes sparkled, his tongue rolled out his light remarks with a visible relish. I looked at the man and saw that he had the soul of a war-horse. Tall, slight, dark, handsome, with bushy beard, quivering nostrils, mobile mouth, and eyes of fire, alive in every

fibre, and full of unconquerable energy. He appeared to be a man of thirty to thirty-five, but proved to be no more than four-and-twenty. I learned afterwards that he was an American, and was travelling for love of adventure.

That night we flew six hours before the storm, but it overtook our ship at last. What befell us then in the darkness of that rock-bound coast I did not know until morning. Can you believe it? I took my usual dose of a drug prescribed to me for insomnia, and lay down to sleep. When I went up on deck in the late dawn of the following day—the time was the spring—the wind had slackened, and the ship was rolling and swinging along in a sea that could not be heard above the beat and thud of the engines. Only the memory of last night's tempest lay around in sullen wave and sky—only there, and in the quarters down below of the native seamen of our ship.

The first face I encountered was that of the American. He had been on deck all night, and he told me what had happened. Through the dark hours the storm had been terrible, and when the first dead light of dawn had crept across from the east the ship had been still tossing in great white billows. Just then a number of Lascars had been ordered aloft on some urgent duty—I know not what—and a sudden gust had swept one of them from a crosstree into the sea. Efforts had been made to rescue him, the engines had been reversed,

boats put out and life-buoys thrown into the water, but all in vain. The man had been swept away; he was gone and the ship had steamed on.

The disaster saddened me inexpressibly. I could see the Lascar fall from the rigging, catch the agonising glance of the white eyes in his black face as he was swept past on the crest of a wave, and watch his outstretched arms as he sank to his death down and down and down. It seemed to me an iniquity that while this had happened I had slept. Perhaps the over-sensitive condition of my nerves was at fault, but indeed I felt that, in his way, in his degree, within the measure of his possibilities, that poor fellow of another skin, another tongue, with whom I had exchanged no word of greeting, had that day given his life for my life.

How much of such emotion I expressed at the time it is hard to remember now, but that the American gathered the bent of my feelings was clear to me by the pains he was at to show that they were uncalled for, and unnatural, and false. What was life? I had set too great a store by it. The modern reverence for life was eating away the finest instincts of man's nature. Life was not the most sacred of our possessions. Duty, justice, truth, these were higher things.

So he talked that day and the next until, from thoughts of the loss of the Lascar, we had drifted far into wider and more perilous

speculations. The American held to his canon. War was often better than peace, and open massacre than corrupt tranquillity. We wanted some of the robust spirit of the Middle Ages in these our piping days. The talk turned on the persecution of the Jews in Russia. The American defended it—a stern people was purging itself of an alien element which, like an interminate tapeworm, had been preying on its vitals. The remedy was drastic but necessary; life was lost, but also life was saved.

Then coming to closer quarters we talked of murder. The American held to the doctrine of Sterne. It was a hard case that the laws of the modern world should not have made any manner of difference between murdering an honest man and only executing a scoundrel. These things should always be rated *ad valorem*. As for blood spilt in self-defence, it was folly to talk of it as crime. Even the laws of my own effeminate land justified the man who struck down the arm that was raised to kill him; and the mind that reckoned such an act as an offence was morbid and diseased.

These opinions were repugnant to me, and I tried to resist them. There was a sanctity about human life which no man should dare to outrage. God gave it, and only God should take it away. As for the government of the world let it be for better or for worse, it was

in God's hands, and God required the help of no man.

My resistance was useless. The American held to his doctrine: it was good to take life in a good cause, and if it was good for the nation, it was good for the individual man. The end was all.

I fenced these statements with what force I could command, and I knew not then how strongly my adversary had assailed me. Now, I know too well that his opinions sank deep into my soul. Only too well I know it now—now that——

We arrived at Gibraltar the following morning, and going up on deck in the empty void of air that follows on the sudden stopping of a ship's engines, I found the American, amid a group of swarthy Gibraltarians, bargaining for a boat to take him to the Mole. It turned out that he was going to Morocco also, and we hired a boat together.

The morning was clear and cold; the great broad rock looked whiter and starker and more like a gigantic oyster-shell than ever against the blue of the sky. There would be no steamer for Tangier until the following day, and we were to put up at the Spanish hotel called the Calpe.

Immediately on landing I made my way to the Post Office to despatch a telegram home announcing my arrival, and there I found two letters, which, having come overland, had arrived

in advance of me. One of them was from Wenman, telling me that he had called at Wimpole Street the morning after my departure and found all well at my house; and also enclosing a resolution of thanks and congratulation from my colleagues of the College of Surgeons in relation to my recent labours, which were said to be "memorable in the cause of humanity and science."

The other letter was from my wife: a sweet, affectionate little note, cheerful yet tender, written on her return from Tilbury, hinting that the dear old house looked just a trifle empty and as if somehow it missed something, but that our boy was up and happy with a new toy that I had left for him as a consolation on his awakening—a great elephant that worked its trunk and roared. "I have just asked our darling," wrote my wife, "what message he would like to send you. 'Tell papa,' he answers, 'I'm all right, and Jumbo's all right, and is he all right, and will he come home werry quick, and see him grunting?'"

That night at the Calpe I had some further talk with the American. Young as he was he had been a great Eastern traveller. Egypt, Arabia, Syria, the Holy Land—he knew them all. For his forthcoming sojourn in Morocco he had prepared himself with elaborate care. The literature of travel in Barbary is voluminous, but he had gone through the best of it. With the faith of Islam he had long been

familiar, and of the corrupt and tyrannical government of Mulai el Hassan and his kaids and kadis he had an intimate knowledge. He had even studied the language of the Moorish people—the Moroccan Arabic, which is a dialect of the language of the Koran—and so that he might hold intercourse with the Sephardic Jews also, who people the Mellahs of Morocco, he had mastered the Spanish language as well.

This extensive equipment, sufficient to start a crusade or to make a revolution, was meant to do more than provide him with adventure. His intention was to see the country and its customs, to observe the manners of the people and the ordinances of their religion. "I shall get into the palaces and the prisons of the Kasbahs," he said; "yes, and the mosques and the saints' houses, and the harems also."

Little as I knew then of the Moors and their country, I foresaw the dangers of such an enterprise, and I warned him against it. "You will get yourself into awkward corners," I said.

"Yes," he said, "and I shall get myself out of them."

I remembered his doctrine propounded on the ship, and I saw that he was a man of resolution, but I said, "Remember, you are going to the land of this people for amusement alone. It is not necessity that thrusts you upon their prejudice, their superstition, and their fanaticism."

"True," he said, "but if I get into trouble among them it will not be my amusements but my liberty or my life that will be in danger."

"Then in such a case you will stick at nothing to plough your way out?"

"Nothing."

I laughed, for my mind refused to believe him, and we laughed noisily together, with visions of bloody daggers before the eyes of both.

Father, my *heart* believed: silently, secretly, unconsciously, it drank in the poison of his thought—drank it in—ay——

Next day, about noon, we sailed for Tangier. Our ship was the *Jackal*, a little old iron steam-tug, battered by time and tempest, clamped and stayed at every side, and just holding together as by the grace of God. The storm which we had outraced from Finisterre had now doubled Cape St. Vincent, and the sea was rolling heavily in the Straits. We saw nothing of this until we had left the bay and were standing out from Tarifa; nor would it be worthy of mention now but that it gave me my first real understanding of the tremendous hold that the faith or the fanaticism of the Moorish people—call it what you will—has upon their characters and lives.

The channel at that point is less than twenty miles wide, but we were more than five hours crossing it. Our little crazy craft laboured terribly in the huge breakers that swept inwards from the Atlantic. Pitching until the foredeck

was covered, rolling until her boats dipped in the water, creaking, shuddering, leaping, she had enough to do to keep afloat.

With the American I occupied the bridge between the paddle-boxes, which served as a saloon for first-class passengers; and below us, in the open hold of the after-deck, a number of Moors sat huddled together among cattle and sheep and baskets of fowls. They were pilgrims, Hadjes, returning from Mecca by way of Gibraltar, and their behaviour during the passage was marvellous in its callousness to the sense of peril. They wrangled, quarrelled, snarled at each other, embraced, kissed, laughed together, made futile attempts to smoke their keef-pipes, and quarrelled, barked, and bleated again.

"Surely," I said, "these people are either wondrously brave or they have no sense of the solemnity of death."

"Neither," said the American; "they are merely fatalists by virtue of their faith. 'If it is now, it is to come; if it is not to come, then it is now.'"

"There is a sort of bravery in that," I answered.

"And cowardice, too," said the American.

The night had closed in when we dropped anchor by the ruins of the Mole at Tangier, and I saw no more of the white town than I had seen of it from the Straits. But if my eyes failed in the darkness my other senses

served me only too well. The shrieking and yelping of the boatloads of Moors and negroes who clambered aboard to relieve us of our luggage, the stench of the town sewers that emptied into the bay—these were my first impressions of the gateway to the home of Islam.

The American went through the turmoil with composure and an air of command, and having seen to my belongings as well as his own, passing them through the open office at the water-gate, where two solemn Moors in white sat by the light of candles, in the receipt of customs, he parted from me at the foot of the street that begins with the Grand Mosque, and is the main artery of the town, for he had written for rooms to the hotel called the Villa de France, and I, before leaving England, had done the same to the hotel called the Continental.

Thither I was led by a barefooted courier in white jellab and red tarboosh, amid sights and sounds of fascinating strangeness: the low drone of men's voices singing their evening prayers in the mosques, the tinkling of the bells of men selling water out of goats' skins, the "Allah" of blind beggars crouching at the gates, the "Arrah" of the mule drivers, and the hooded shapes going by in the gloom or squatting in the red glare of the cafés without windows or doors and open to the streets.

I met the American in the Sôk—the market-place—the following day, and he took me up to

his hotel to see some native costumes which he had bought by way of preparation for his enterprise. They were haiks and soolhams, jellabs, kaftans, slippers, rosaries, korans, sashes, satchels, turbans, and tarbooshes—blue, white, yellow, and red—all right and none too new, for he had purchased them not at the bazaars, but from the son of a learned Moor, a Táleb, who had been cast into a prison by a usurer Jew.

"In these," said he, "I mean to go everywhere, and I'll defy the devil himself to detect me."

"Take care," I said, "take care."

He laughed, and asked me what my own plans were. I told him that I would remain in Tangier until I received letters from home, and then push on towards Fez.

"I'll see you there," he said; "but if I do not hail you, please do not know me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," I said, and so we parted.

I stayed ten days longer in Tangier, absorbed in many reflections, of which the strangest were these two: first, that the Moors were the most religious people in the world, and next, that they were the most wickedly irreligious and basely immoral race on God's earth. I was prompted to the one by observation of the large part which Allah appears to play in all affairs of Moorish life, and to the other by clear proof of the much larger part which the devil

enacts in Allah's garments. On the one side prayers, prayers, prayers, the moodden, the moodden, the moodden, the mosque, the mosque, the mosque. "Allah" in the mouths of the beggars, "Allah" from the lips of the merchants, "Mohammed" on the inscriptions at the gate, the "Koran" on the scalfs hung out at the bazaars and on the satchels hawked in the streets. And on the other side shameless lying, cheating, usury, buying and selling of justice, cruelty and inhumanity; raw sores on the backs of the asses, blood in the streets, blood, blood, blood everywhere and secret corruption indescribable.

Nevertheless I concluded that my nervous malady must have given me the dark glasses through which everything looked so foul, and I resolved, in the interests of health, to push on towards Fez as soon as letters arrived from home assuring me that all were well and happy there.

But no letters came, and at the arrival of every fresh mail from Cadiz and from Gibraltar my impatience increased. At length I decided to wait no longer, and, leaving instructions that my letters should be sent on after me to the capital, I called on the English Consul for such official documents as were needed for my journey.

When these had been procured from the Kasbah, and I was equipped for travel, the Consul inquired of me how I liked the Moors

and their country. I described my conflicting impressions, and he said both were right in their several ways.

"The religion of the Moor," said he, "is genuine of its kind, though it does not put an end to the vilest Government on earth and the most loathsome immoralities ever practised by man. Islam is a sacred thing to him. He is proud of it, jealous of it, and prepared to die for it. Half his hatred of the unbeliever is fear that the Nazarene or the Jew is eager to show his faith some dishonour. And that," added the Consul, "reminds me to offer you one word of warning: avoid the very shadow of offence to the religion of these people; do not pry into their beliefs; do not take note of their ordinances; pass their mosques and saints' houses with downcast eyes, if need be; in a word, let Islam alone."

I thanked him for his counsel, and, remembering the American, I inquired what the penalty would be if a foreign subject offended the religion of this people. The Consul lifted his eyebrows and shoulders together, with an eloquence of reply that required no words.

"But might not a stranger," I asked, "do so unwittingly?"

"Truly," he answered, "and so much the worse for his ignorance."

"Is British life, then," I said, "at the mercy of the first ruffian with a dagger? Is there no power in solemn treaties?"

"What are treaties," he said, "against fanaticism? Give the one a wide berth and you'll have small need for the other."

After that he told me something of certain claims just settled for long imprisonment inflicted by the Moorish authorities on men trading under the protection of the British flag. It was an abject story of barbarous cruelty, broken health, shattered lives, and wrecked homes, atoned for after weary procrastination, in the manner of all Oriental courts, by a sorry money payment. The moral of it all was conveyed by the Consul in the one word with which he parted from me at his gate: "Respect the fanaticism of these fanatics," he said, "as you would value your liberty or your life, and keep out of a Moorish prison—remember that, remember that!"

I *did* remember it. Every day of my travels I remembered it. I remembered it at the most awful moment of my life. If I had not remembered it then, should I be lying here now with that—with *that*—behind me! Ah, wait, wait!

Little did I expect when I left the Consul to light so soon upon a terrible illustration of his words. With my guide and interpreter, a Moorish soldier lent to me by the authorities in return for two pesetas (one shilling and ninepence) a day, I strolled into the greater Sôk, the market-place outside the walls. It was Friday, the holy day of the Moslems, somewhere between one and two o'clock in the after-

noon, when the body of the Moors having newly returned from their one-hour observances in the mosques, had resumed, according to their wont, their usual occupations. The day was fine and warm, a bright sun was shining, and the Sôk at the time when we entered it was a various and animated scene.

Dense crowds of hooded figures, clad chiefly in white—soiled or dirty white—men in jellabs, women enshrouded in blankets, barefooted girls, boys with shaven polls, water-carriers with their tinkling bells, snake-charmers, story-tellers, jugglers, preachers, and then donkeys, nosing their way through the throng, mules lifting their necks above the people's heads, and camels munching oats and fighting—it was a wilderness of writhing forms and a Babel of shrieking noises.

With my loquacious Moor I pushed my way along past booths and stalls until I came to a whitewashed structure with a white flag floating over it, that stood near the middle of the market-place. It was a roofless place, about fifteen feet square, and something like a little sheepfold, but having higher walls. Through the open doorway I saw an inner inclosure, out of which a man came forward. He was a wild-eyed creature in tattered garments, dirty, dishevelled, and malevolent of face.

"See," said my guide, "see, my lord, a Moorish saint's house. Look at the flag. So shall my lord know a saint's house. Here rest

the bones of Sidi Gali, and that is the saint that guards them. A holy man, yes, a holy, man. Moslems pay him tribute. Sacred place yes, sacred. No Nazarene may enter it. But Muslems, yes, Muslems may fly here for sanctuary. Life to the Muslem, death to the Nazarene. So it is."

My soldier was rattling on in this way when I saw coming in the sunlight down the hillside of which the Sôk is the foot a company of some eight or ten men, whose dress and complexion were unlike those of the people gathered there. They were a band of warlike persons, swarthy, tall, lithe, sinewy, with heads clean shaven save for one long lock that hung from the crown, each carrying a gun with barrel of prodigious length upon his shoulder, and also armed with a long naked Reefian knife stuck in the scarf that served him for a belt.

They were Berbers, the descendants of the race that peopled Barbary before the Moors set foot in it, between whom and the Moors there is a long-continued, suppressed, but ineradicable enmity. From their mountain homes these men had come to the town that day on their pleasure or their business, and as they entered it they were at no pains to conceal their contempt for the townspeople and their doings.

Swaggering along with long strides, they whooped and laughed and ploughed their way through the crowd over bread and vegetables spread out on the ground, and the people fell

back before them with muttered curses until they were come near to the saint's house beside which I myself with my guide was standing. Then I saw that the keeper of the saint's house, the half-distraught creature whom I had just observed, was spitting out at them some bitter and venomous sayings.

Clearly they all heard him, and most of them laughed derisively and pushed on. But one of the number—a young Berber with eyes of fire—drew up suddenly and made some answer in hot and rapid words. The man of the saint's house spoke again, showing his teeth as he did so in a horrible grin; and at the next instant, almost quicker than my eyes could follow the swift movement of his hands, the Berber had plucked his long knife from his belt and plunged it in the keeper's breast.

I saw it all. The man fell at my feet, and was dead in an instant. In another moment the police of the market had laid hold of the murderer, and he was being hauled off to his trial. "Come," whispered my guide, and he led me by short cuts through the narrow lanes to the Kasbah.

In an open alcove of the castle I found two men in stainless blue jellabs and spotless white turbans, squatting on rush mats at either foot of the horseshoe arch. These were the judges, the Kadi and his Kaleefa, sitting in session in the hall of justice.

There was a tumult of many voices and of

hurrying feet; and presently the police entered, holding their prisoner between them, and followed by a vast concourse of townspeople. I held my ground in front of the alcove, the Berber was brought up near to my side, and I saw and heard all.

"This man," said one of the police, "killed so-and-so, of Sidi Gali's saint's house."

"When?" said the Kadi.

"This moment," said the police.

"How?" said the Kadi.

"With this knife," said the police.

The knife, stained, and still wet, was handed to the judge. He shook it, and asked the prisoner one question: "Why?"

Then the Berber flung himself on his knees —his shaven head brushed my hand—and began to plead extenuating circumstances. "It is true my lord, I killed him, but he called me dog and infidel, and spat at me——"

The Kadi gave back the knife and waved his hand. "Take him away," he said.

That was all, as my guide interpreted it. "Come," he whispered again, and he led me by a passage into a sort of closet where a man lay on a mattress. This was the porch to the prison, and the man on the mattress was the jailor. In one wall there was a low door, barred and clamped with iron, and having a round peephole grated across.

At the next instant the police brought in their prisoner. The jailor rattled a big key in the

lock, the low door swung open, I saw within a dark den full of ghostly figures dragging chains at their ankles, a foul stench came out of it, the prisoner bent his head and was pushed in, the door slammed back—and that was the end. Everything occurred in no more time than it takes to tell it.

"Is that all his trial?" I asked.

"All," said my guide.

"How long will he lie there?"

"Until death."

"But," I said, "I have heard that a Kadi of your country may be bribed to liberate a murderer."

"Ah, my lord is right," said my guide, "but not the murderer of a saint."

Less than five minutes before I had seen the stalwart young Berber swaggering down the hillside in the afternoon sunshine. Now he was in the gloom of the noisome dungeon, with no hope of ever again looking upon the light of day, doomed to drag out an existence worse than death, and all for what? For taking life? No, no, no—life in that land is cheap, cheaper than it ever was in the Middle Ages—but for doing dishonour to a superstition of the faith of Islam.

I remembered the American, and shuddered at the sight of this summary justice. Next morning, as my tentmen and muleteers were making ready to set out for Fez, my soldier guide brought me a letter which had come with

the French steamer by way of Malaga. It was from home—a brief note from my wife, with no explanation of her prolonged silence, merely saying that all was as usual at Wimpole Street, and not mentioning our boy at all. The omission troubled me, the brevity and baldness of the message filled me with vague concern, and I had half a mind to delay my inland journey. Would that I had done so! Would that I had! Oh, would that I had!

(*Terrible, my son, terrible! A blighted and desolated land. But even worse than its own people are the renegades it takes from mine. Ah, I knew one such long ago. An outcast, a pariah, a shedder of blood, an apostate. But go on, go on.*)

II

FATHER, what voice was it that rang in my ears and cried, "Stay, do not travel; all your past from the beginning until to-day, all your future from to-day until the end, hangs on your action now; go, and your past is a waste, your fame a mockery, your success a reproach; remain, and your future is peace and happiness and content!" What voice, father, what voice?

I shut my ears to it, and six days afterwards I arrived at Fez. My journey had impressed two facts upon my mind with startling vividness; first, that the Moor would stick at nothing in his jealousy of the honour of his faith, and next, that I was myself a changed and coarsened man. I was reminded of the one when in El Kassar I saw an old Jew beaten in the open streets because he had not removed his slippers and walked barefoot as he passed the front of a mosque; and again in Wazzan, when I witnessed the welcome given to the Grand Shereef on his return from his home in Tangier to his house in the capital of his province. The Jew was the chief usurer of the town, and had half the Moorish inhabitants in his toils; yet his

commercial power had counted for nothing against the honour of Islam. "I," said he to me that night in the Jewish inn, the Fondak, "I, who could clap every man of them in the Kasbah, and their masters with them, for moneys they owe me, I to be treated like a dog by these scurvy sons of Ishmael—God of Jacob!" The Grand Shereef was a drunkard, a gamester, and worse. There was no ordinance of Mohammed which he had not openly outraged, yet because he stood to the people as the descendant of the Prophet and the father of the faith, they grovelled on the ground before him and kissed his robes, his knees, his feet, his stirrups, and the big hoofs of the horse that carried him. As for myself, I realised that the atmosphere of the country had corrupted me, when I took out from my baggage a curved knife in its silver-mounted sheath, which I had bought of a hawker at Tangier, and fixed it prominently in the belt of my Norfolk jacket.

The morning after my arrival in Fez I encountered my American companion of the voyage. Our meeting was a strange one. I had rambled aimlessly with my guide through the new town into the old until I had lighted by chance upon the slave market in front of the ruins of the ancient Grand Mosque, and upon a human auction which was then proceeding. No scene so full of shame had I ever seen before, but the fascination of the spectacle held me, and

I stood and watched and listened. The slave being sold was a black girl, and she was beautiful according to the standard of her skin, bareheaded, barefooted, and clad as lightly over her body as decency allowed, so as to reveal the utmost of her charms.

"Now, brothers," cried the salesman, "look, see" (pinching the girl's naked arms and rolling his jewelled fingers from her chin downwards over her bare neck on to her bosom), "sound of wind and limb, and with rosy lips, fit for the kisses of a king—how much?"

"A hundred dollars," cried a voice out of the crowd. I thought I had heard the voice before, and looked up to see who had spoken. It was a tall man with haïk over his turban, and blue soolham on top of a yellow kaftan.

"A hundred dollars offered," cried the salesman, "only a hundred. Brothers, now's the chance for all true believers."

"A hundred and five," cried another voice.

"A hundred and ten."

"A hundred and fifteen."

"A hundred and fifteen for this jewel of a girl," cried the salesman. "It's giving her away, brothers. By the prophets, if you are not quick I'll keep her for myself. Come, look at her, Sidi. Isn't she good enough for a sultan? The Prophet (God rest him) would have leapt at her. He loved sweet women as much as he loved sweet odours. Now, for the third and last time—how much? Remember,

I guarantee her seventeen years of age, sound, strong, plump, and sweet."

"A hundred and twenty," cried the voice I had heard first. I looked up at the speaker again. It was the American in his Moorish costume.

I could bear no more of the sickening spectacle, and as I turned aside with my interpreter I was conscious that my companion of the voyage was following me. When we came to some dark arcades that divide Old Fez from New Fez the American spoke, and I sent my interpreter ahead.

"You see I am giving myself full tether in this execrable land," he said.

"Indeed you are," I answered.

"Well, as the Romans in Rome, you know—it was what I came for," he said.

"Take care," I replied. "Take care."

He drew up shortly and said, "By the way, I ought to be ashamed to meet you."

I thought he ought, but for courtesy I asked him why.

"Because," said he, "I have failed to act up to my principles."

"In what?" I inquired.

"In saving the life of a scoundrel at the risk of my own," he answered.

Then he told me his story. "I left Tangier," he said, "with four men in my caravan, but it did not suit me to bring them into Fez, so I dismissed them a day's ride from here, paying

in full for the whole journey and making a present over. My generosity was a blunder. The Moor cannot comprehend an act of disinterested kindness, and I saw the ruffians lay their heads together to find out what it could mean. Three of them gave it up and went off home, but the fourth determined to follow the trace. His name was Larby."

(*Larby? El Arby, my son? Did you say El Arby? Of Tangier, too? A Moor? Or was he a Spanish renegade turned Muslem? But no matter—no matter.*)

"He was my guide," said the American, "and a most brazen hypocrite, always cheating me. I let him do so, it amused me—always lying to my face, and always fumbling his beads—God forgive me! God forgive me'—an appropriate penance, you know the way of it. 'Peace, Sidi!' said the rascal: 'Farewell! Allah send we meet in Paradise.' But the devil meant that we should meet before that. We have met. It was a hot moment. Do you know the Hamadshà Mosque? It is a place in a side street sacred to the preaching of a fanatical follower of one Sidi Ali bin Hamdoosh, and to certain wild dances executed in a glass-and-fire-eating frenzy. I thought I should like to hear a Moorish D. L. Moody, and one day I went there. As I was going in I met a man coming out. It was Larby. 'Beeba!' he whispered with a tragic start—that was his own name for

me on the journey. 'Keep your tongue between your teeth,' I whispered back. 'I was Beeba yesterday, to-day I'm Sidi Mohammed.' Then I entered, spread my prayer-mat, chanted my first Sura, listened to a lusty sermon, and came out. There, as I expected, in the blind lane leading from the Hamadshà to the town, was Larby waiting for me. 'Beeba,' said he, with a grin, 'you play a double hand of cards.' 'Then,' said I, 'take care I don't trump your trick.' The rascal had thought I might bribe him, and when he knew that I would not I saw murder in his face. He had conceived the idea of betraying me at the next opportunity. At that moment he was as surely aiming at my life as if he had drawn his dagger and stabbed me. It was then that I disgraced my principles."

"How? how?" I said, though truly I had little need to ask.

"We were alone, I tell you, in a blind lane," said the American; "but I remembered stories the man had told me of his children. 'Little Hoolia,' he called his daughter, a pretty, black-eyed mite of six, who always watched for him when he was away."

I was breaking into perspiration. "Do you mean," I said, "that you should have——"

"I mean that I should have killed the scoundrel there and then!" said the American.

"God forbid it!" I cried, and my hair rose from my scalp in horror.

"Why not?" said the American. "It would have been an act of *self-defence*. The man meant to kill *me*. He will kill me still if I give him the chance. What is the difference between murder in a moment and murder after five, ten, fifteen, twenty days? Only that one is murder in hot blood and haste and the other is murder in cold blood and by stealth. Is it life that you think so precious? Then, why should I value *his* life more than I value *my own?*"

I shivered, and could say nothing.

"You think me a monster," said the American, "but remember, since we left England the atmosphere has changed."

"Remember, too," I said, "that this man can do you no harm unless you intrude yourself upon his superstitions again. Leave the country immediately; depend upon it, he is following you."

"That's not possible," said the American, "for *I* am following *him*. Until I come up with him I can do nothing and my existence is not worth a pin's purchase."

I shuddered, and we parted. My mind told me that he was right, but my heart clamoured above the voice of reason and said, "*You* could not do it, no, not to save a hundred lives."

Ah, father, how little we know ourselves—how little, oh, how little! When I think that *he* shrank back—he who held life so cheap—while *I*—I who held it so dear, so sacred, so god-like——

Bear with me; I will tell all.

I met the American at intervals during the next six days. We did not often speak, but as we passed in the streets—he alone, I always with my loquacious interpreter—I observed with dread the change that the shadow of death hanging over a man's head can bring to pass in his face and manner. He grew thin and sallow and wild-eyed. One day he stopped me, and said: "I know now what it is to die of the shadow of death."

But about ten days after our first meeting in the slave market he stopped me again, and said, quite cheerfully: "He has gone home—I'm satisfied of that now."

"Thank God!" I answered involuntarily.

"Ah," he said, with a twinkle of the eye, "who says that a man must hang up his humanity on the peg with his hat in the hospital hall when he goes to be a surgeon? If the poet Keats had got over the first shock to his sensibilities, he might have been the greatest surgeon of his day."

"You'll be more careful in future," I said, "not to cross the fanaticism of these fanatics?"

He smiled, and asked if I knew the Karueein Mosque. I told him I had seen it.

"It is the greatest in Morocco," he said. "The Moors say the inner court stands on eight hundred pillars. I don't believe them, and I mean to see for myself."

I found it useless to protest, and he went his

way, laughing at my blanched and bewildered face. "That man," I thought, "is fit to be the hero of a tragedy, and he is wasting himself on a farce."

Meanwhile, I had a shadow over my own life which would not lift. That letter which I had received from home at the moment of leaving Tangier had haunted me throughout the journey. Its brevity, its insufficiency, its delay, and above all its conspicuous omission of all mention of our boy, had given rise to endless speculation. Every dark possibility that fancy could devise had risen before me by way of explanation. I despised myself for such weakness, but self-contempt did nothing to allay my vague fears. The child was ill; I knew it; I felt it; I could swear to it as certainly as if my ears could hear the laboured breathing in his throat.

Nevertheless I went on; so much did my philosophy do for me. But when I got to Fez I walked straightway to the English post-office to see if there was a letter awaiting me. Of course there was no letter there. I had not reflected that I had come direct from the port through which the mails had to pass, and that if the postal courier had gone by me on the road I must have seen him, which I had not.

I was ashamed before my own consciousness, but, all the same, the post-office saw me every day. Whatever the direction that I took with

my interpreter, it led towards that destination in the end. And whatever the subject of his ceaseless gabble—a very deluge of words—it was forced to come round at last to the times and seasons of the mails from England. These were bi-weekly, with various possibilities of casual arrivals besides.

Fez is a noble city, the largest and finest Oriental city I had yet seen, fit to compare in its own much different way of beauty and of splendour with the great cities of the West, the great cities of the earth, and of all time; but for me its attractions were overshadowed by the gloom of my anxiety. The atmosphere of an older world, the spirit of the East, the sense of being transported to Bible times, the startling interpretations which the Biblical stories were receiving by the events of every day—these brought me no pleasure. As for the constant reminders of the presence of Islam every hour, at every corner, the perpetual breath of prayer and praise, which filled this land that was corrupt to the core, they gave me pain more poignant than disgust. The call of the mueddin in the early morning was a daily agony. I slept three streets from the Karueein minarets, but the voice seemed to float into my room in the darkness, and coil round my head and ring in my ears. Always I was awakened at the first sound of the stentorian "Allah-u-Kabar," or, if I awoke in the silence and thought with a feeling of relief, "It is over, I have slept through

it," the howling wail would suddenly break in upon my thanksgiving.

There was just one fact of life in Fez that gave me a kind of melancholy joy. At nearly every turn of a street my ears were arrested by the multitudinous cackle, the broken, various-voiced sing-song of a children's school. These Moorish schools interested me. They were the simplest of all possible institutes, consisting usually of a rush-covered cellar, two steps down from the street, with the teacher, the Táleb, often a half-blind old man, squatting in the middle of the floor, and his pupils seated about him, all reciting together some passages of the Koran, the only text-book of education. One such school was close under my bed-room window; I heard the drone of it as early as seven o'clock every morning, and as often as I went abroad I stood for a moment and looked in at the open door-way. A black boy sat there with a basket for the alms of passers-by. He was a bright-eyed little fellow, six or seven years of age, and he knew one English phrase only: "Come on," he would say, and hold up the basket and smile. What pathetic interest his sunny face had for me, how he would cheer and touch me, with what strange memories his voice and laugh would startle me, it would be pitiful to tell.

Bear with me! I was far from my own darling, I was in a strange land, I was a weak man for all that I was thought so strong, and

my one besetting infirmity—more consuming than a mother's love—was preyed upon by my failing health, which in turn was preying upon itself.

And if the sights of the streets brought me pain, or pleasure that was akin to pain, what of the sights, the visions, the dreams of my own solitary mind! I could not close my eyes in the darkness but I saw my boy. His little child-ghost was always with me. He never appeared as I had oftenest seen him—laughing, romping, and kicking up his legs on the hearth-rug. Sometimes he came as he would do at home after he had committed some childish trespass and I had whipped him—opening the door of my room and stepping one pace in, quietly, nervously, half fearfully, to say good-night and kiss me at his bedtime, and I would lift my eyes and see, over the shade of my library lamp, his little sober red-and-white face just dried of its recent tears. Or, again, sometimes, I myself would seem in these dumb dramas of the darkness to go into his room when he was asleep, that I might indulge my hungry foolish heart with looks of fondness that the reproving parent could not give, and find him sleeping with an open book in his hands, which he had made believe to read. And then for sheer folly of love I would pick up his wee knickerbockers and turn out its load at either side, to see what a boy's pockets might be like, and discover a curiosity shop of poor little treasures—a knife

with a broken blade, a nail, two marbles, a bit of brass, some string, a screw, a crust of bread, a cork, and the leg of a lobster.

While I was indulging this weakness the conviction was deepening in my mind that my boy was ill. So strong did this assurance become at length, that, though I was ashamed to give way to it so far as to set my face towards home, being yet no better for my holiday, I sat down at length to write a letter to Wenman—I had written to my wife by every mail—that I might relieve my pent-up feelings. I said nothing to him of my misgivings, for I was loth to confess to them, having no positive reasons whatever and no negative grounds except the fact that I was receiving no letters. But I gave him a full history of my boy's case, described each stage of its in the past, foretold its probable developments in the future, indicated with elaborate care the treatment necessary at every point, and foeshadowed the contingencies under which it might in the end become malignant and even deadly, unless stopped by the operation that I had myself, after years of labour, found the art of making.

I spent an afternoon in the writing of this letter, and when it was done I felt as if a burden that had been on my back for ages had suddenly been lifted away. Then I went out alone to post it. The time was close to evening prayers and as I walked through the streets the Tálebs and tradesmen, with their prayer-mats under

their arms, were trooping into the various mosques. Going by the Karueein Mosque I observed that the good Muslimeen were entering it by hundreds. "Some special celebration," I thought. My heart was light, my eyes were alert, and my step was quick. For the first time since my coming to the city, Fez seemed to me a beautiful place. The witchery of the scenes of the streets took hold of me. To be thus transported into a world of two thousand years ago gave me the delight of magic.

When I reached the English post-office I found it shut up. On its shutters behind its iron grating a notice-board was hung out, saying that the office was temporarily closed for the sorting of an incoming mail and the despatch of an outgoing one. There was a little crowd of people waiting in front—chiefly Moorish servants of English visitors—for the window to open again, and near by stood the horses of the postal couriers pawing the pavement. I dropped my letter into the slit in the window, and then stood aside to see if the mail had brought anything for me at last.

The window was thrown up, and two letters were handed to me through the grating over the heads of the Moors, who were crushing underneath. I took them with a sort of fear, and half wished at the first moment that they might be from strangers. They were from home: one was from my wife—I knew the en-

velope before looking at the handwriting—the other was from Wenman.

I read Wenman's letter first. Good or bad, the news must be broken to me gently. Hardly had I torn the sheet open when I saw what it contained. My little Noel had been ill; he was still so, but not seriously, and I was not to be alarmed. The silence on their part which I had complained of so bitterly had merely been due to their fear of giving me unnecessary anxiety. For his part (Wenman's) he would have written before, relying on my manliness and good sense, but my wife had restrained him, saying she knew me better. There was no cause for apprehension; the boy was going along as well as could be expected, &c. &c. &c.

Not a word to indicate the nature and degree of the attack. Such an insufficient epistle must have disquieted the veriest nincompoop alive. To send a thing like that to *me*—to me of all men! Was there ever so gross a mistake of judgment?

I knew in an instant what the fact must be—my boy was down with that old congenital infirmity of the throat. Surely my wife had told me more. She had. Not by design, but unwittingly she had revealed the truth to me. Granville Wenman had written to me, she said, explaining everything, and I was not to worry and bother. All that was possible was being done for our darling, and if I were there I could

do no more. The illness had to have its course, so I must be patient. All this in the usual jargon of the surgery—I know that Wenman had dictated it—and then a true line or two worth all the rest from my dear girl's own bleeding mother's heart. Our poor Noel was this, and that, he complained of so-and so, and first began to look unwell in such and such ways.

It was clear as noonday. The attack of the throat which I had foreseen had come. Five years I had looked for it. Through five long years I had waited and watched to check it. I had laboured day and night that when it should come I might meet it. My own health I had wasted—and for what? For fame, for wealth, for humanity, for science? No, no, no, but for the life of my boy. And now when his enemy was upon him at length, where was I—I who alone in all this world of God could save him? I was thirteen hundred miles from home.

Oh, the irony of my fate! My soul rose in rebellion against it. Staggering back through the darkening streets, the whole city seemed dead and damned.

How far I walked in this state of oblivion I do not know, but presently out of the vague atmosphere wherein all things had been effaced I became conscious, like one awakening after a drug, of an unusual commotion going on around. People were running past me and across me in the direction of the Karuccin Mosque. From

that place a loud tumult was rising into the air. The noise was increasing with every moment, and rising to a Babel of human voices.

I did not very much heed the commotion. What were the paltry excitements of life to me now? I was repeating to myself the last words of my poor wife's letter: "How I miss you, and wish you were with me!" "I will go back," I was telling myself, "I will go back."

In the confusion of my mind I heard snatches of words spoken by the people as they ran by me. "Nazarene!" "Christian!" "Cursed Jew!" These were hissed out at each other by the Moors as they were scurrying past. At length I heard a Spaniard shout up to a fellow-countryman who was on a housetop: "Englishman caught in the mosque."

At that my disordered senses recovered themselves, and suddenly I became aware that the tumult was coming in my direction. The noise grew deeper, louder, and more shrill at every step. In another moment it had burst upon me in a whirlpool of uproar.

Round the corner of the narrow lane that led to the Karueein Mosque a crowd of people came roaring like a torrent. They were Moors, Arabs, and Berbers, and they were shouting, shrieking, yelling, yelping, and uttering every sound that the human voice can make. At the first instant I realised no more than this, but at the next I saw that the people were hunting a man as hounds hunt a wolf. The man was fly-

ing before them; he was coming towards me: in the gathering darkness I could see him; his dress, which was Moorish, was torn into shreds about his body; his head was bare; his chest was bleeding; I saw his face—it was the face of the American, my companion of the voyage.

He saw me too, and at that instant he turned about and faced full upon his pursuers. What happened then I dare not tell.

Father, he was a brave man, and he sold his life dearly. But he fell at last. He was but one to a hundred. The yelping human dogs trod him down like vermin.

I am a coward. I fled and left him. When I got back to my lodgings I called for my guide, for I was resolved to leave Fez without an hour's delay. The guide was not to be found, and I had to go in search of him. When I lit on him, at length, he was in a dingy coffee-house, squatting on the ground by the side of another Moor, an evil-looking scoundrel, who was reciting some brave adventure to a group of admiring listeners.

I called my man out and told him of my purpose. He lifted his hands in consternation. "Leave Fez to-night?" he said. "Impossible, my Sultan, impossible! My lord has not heard the order?"

"What order?" I asked. I was alarmed. Must I be a prisoner in Morocco while my child lay dying in England?

"That the gates be closed and no Christian

allowed to leave the city until morning. It is the order of the Kaleefa, my Sultan, since the outrage of the Christian in the mosque this morning."

I suspected the meaning of this move in an instant, and the guide's answers to my questions ratified my fears. One man, out of madness or thirst for revenge, had led the attack upon the American, and a crowd of fanatics had killed him—giving him no chance of retreat with his life, either by circumcision or the profession of Islam. But cooler heads had already found time to think of the penalty of shedding Christian blood. That penalty was twofold: first, the penalty of disgrace which would come of the idea that the lives of Christians were not safe in Morocco, and next, the penalty of hard dollars to be paid to the American Minister at Tangier. To escape from the double danger the outrage was to be hushed up. Circumstances lent themselves to this artifice. True, that the passage of the American across country had been known in every village through which he had passed; but at the gates of Fez he had himself cut off all trace of his identity. He had entered the city alone, or in disguise. His arrival as a stranger had not been notified at any of the "clubs" or bazaars. Only one man had recognised him: that man was Larby, his guide.

The body was to be buried secretly, no Christian being allowed to see it. Then the

report was to be given out that the dead man had been a Moorish subject, that he had been killed in a blood-feud, and that the rumour that he was a Christian caught in the act of defiling the mosque was an error, without the shadow of truth in it. But until all this had been done no Christian should be allowed to pass through the gates. As things stood at present the first impulse of a European would be to fly to his Consul with the dangerous news.

I knew something of the Moors and their country by this time, and I left Fez that night, but it cost me fifty pounds to get out of it. There was a bribe for the Kaid, a bribe for the Kaleefa, and bribes for every ragged Jack of the underlings down to the porter at the gate.

With all my horror and the fever of my anxiety, I could have laughed in the face of the first of these functionaries. Between his greedy desire of the present I was offering him, his suspicion that I knew something of the identity of the Christian who had been killed, his misgivings as to the reasons of my sudden flight, and his dread that I would discover the circumstances of the American's death, the figure he cut was a foolish one. But why should I reproach the man's duplicity? I was practising the like of it myself. Too well I knew that if I betrayed any knowledge of what had happened it would be impossible that I should be allowed to leave Fez. So I pre-

tended to know nothing. It was a ridiculous interview.

On my way back from it I crossed a little company of Moors, leading, surrounding, and following a donkey. The donkey was heavily laden with what appeared to be two great panniers of rubbish. It was dusk, but my sight has always been keen, and I could not help seeing that hidden under the rubbish there was another burden on the donkey's back. It was the body of a dead man. I had little doubt of who the dead man must be ; but I hastened on and did not look again. The Moors turned into a garden as I passed them. I guessed what they were about to do there, but my own danger threatened me, and I wished to see and know no more.

As I was passing out of the town in the moonlight an hour before midnight, with my grumbling tentmen and muleteers at my heels, a man stepped out of the shadow of the gateway arch and leered in my face, and said in broken English, "So your Christian friend is corrected by Allah!"

(*Moorish - English, my son, or Spanish?*)

Spanish. It was the scoundrel whom I had seen in the coffee-house. I knew he must be Larby, and that he had betrayed his master at last. Also, I knew that he was aware that I had seen all. At that moment, looking down from my horse's back into the man's evil face, my whole

nature changed. I remembered the one opportunity which the American had lost out of a wandering impulse of human tenderness—of saving his own life by taking the life of him that threatened it, and I said in my heart of hearts, "Now God in heaven keep me from the like temptation."

Ah! father, do not shrink from me; think of it, only think of it! I was thirteen hundred miles from home, and I was going back to my dying boy.

(God keep you, indeed, my son. Your feet were set in a slippery place. El Arby, you say? A man of your own age? Dark? Sallow? It must be the same. Long ago I knew the man you speak of. It was under another name, and in another country. Yes, he was all you say. God forgive him, God forgive him! Poor wrecked and bankrupt soul. His evil angel was always at his hand, and his good one far away. He brought his father to shame, and his mother to the grave. There was a crime and conviction, then banishment, and after that his father fled from the world. But the Church is peace; he took refuge with her, and now all is well. Go on.)

III

Father, I counted it up. Every mile of the distance I counted it. And I reckoned every hour since my wife's letter had been written against the progress and period of my boy's disease. So many days since the date of the letter, and Noel had been ailing and ill so many days before that. The gross sum of those days was so much, and in that time the affection, if it ran the course I looked for, must have reached such and such a stage. While I toiled along over the broad wastes of that desolate land, I seemed to know at any moment what the condition must be at the utmost and best of my boy in his bed at home.

Then I reckoned the future as well as the past. So many days it would take me to ride to Tangier, so many hours to cross from Tangier to Cadiz, so many days and nights by rail from Cadiz to London. The grand total of time past since my poor Noel first became unwell, and of time to come before I could reach his side, would be so much. What would his condition be then? I knew that also. It would be so-and-so.

Thus, step by step I counted it all up. The interval would be long, very long, between the beginning of the attack and my getting home, but not too long for my hopes. All going well with me, I should still arrive in time. If the disease had taken an evil turn, my boy might perhaps be in its last stages. But then *I* would be there, and I could save him. The operation which I had spent five years of my life to master would bring him back from the gates of death itself.

Father, I had no doubt of that, and I had no doubt of my calculations. Lying here now it seems as if the fiends themselves must have shrieked to see me in that far-off land gambling like a fool in the certainty of the life I loved, and reckoning nothing of the hundred poor chances that might snuff it out like a candle. Call it frenzy, call it madness, nevertheless it kept my heart alive, and saved me from despair.

But, oh! the agony of my impatience! If anything should stop me now! Let me be one day later—only one—and what might not occur! Then, how many were the dangers of delay! First, there was the possibility of illness overtaking me. My health was not better, but worse, than when I left home. I was riding from sunrise to sunset, and not sleeping at nights. No matter! I put all fear from that cause away from me. Though my limbs refused to bear me up, and under the affliction of my

nerves my muscles lost the power to hold the reins, yet if I could be slung on to the back of my horse I should still go on.

But then there was the worse danger of coming into collision with the fanaticism of the people through whose country I had to pass. I did not fear the fate of the American, for I could not be guilty of his folly. But I remembered the admission of the English Consul at Tangier that a stranger might offend the superstitions of the Muslems unwittingly; I recalled his parting words of counsel, spoken half in jest, "Keep out of a Moorish prison"; and then the noisome dungeon into which the young Berber had been cast arose before my mind in visions of horror.

What precautions I took to avoid these dangers of delay would be a long and foolish story. Also, it would be a mean and abject one, and I should be ashamed to tell it. How I saluted every scurvy beggar on the way with the salutation of his faith and country; how I dismounted as I approached a town or a village, and only returned to the saddle when I had gone through it; how I uncovered my head—in ignorance of Eastern custom—as I went by a saint's house, and how at length (remembering the Jewish banker who was beaten) I took off my shoes and walked barefoot as I passed in front of a mosque.

Yes, it was I who paid all this needless homage; I whose pride has always been my

bane; I who could not bend the knee to be made a knight; I who have felt humility before no man. Even so it was. In my eagerness, my impatience, my dread of impediment on my journey home to my darling who waited for me there, I was studying the faces and grovelling at the feet of that race of ignorant fanatics.

But the worst of my impediments were within my own camp. The American was right. The Moor cannot comprehend a disinterested action. My foolish homage to their faith awakened the suspicions of my men. When they had tried in vain to fathom the meaning of it, they agreed to despise me. I did not heed their contempt, but I was compelled to take note of its consequences. From being my servants, they became my masters. When it pleased them to encamp I had to rest, though my inclination was to go on, and only when it suited them to set out again could I resume my journey. In vain did I protest, and plead, and threaten. The Moor is often a brave man, but these men were a gang of white-livered poltroons, and a blow would have served to subdue them. With visions of a Moorish prison before my eyes I dared not raise my hand. One weapon alone could I, in my own cowardice, employ against them—bribes, bribes, bribes. And such was the sole instrument with which I combated their laziness, their duplicity, and their deceit.

Father, I was a pitiful sight in my weakness and my impatience. We had not gone far out

of Fez when I observed that the man Larby was at the heels of our company. This alarmed me, and I called to my guide.

"Alee," I said, "who is that evil-looking fellow?"

Alee threw up both hands in amazement. "Evil-looking fellow!" he cried. "God be gracious to my father! Who does my lord mean? Not Larby; no, not Larby. Larby is a good man. He lives in one of the mosque houses at Tangaa. The Nadir leased it to him, and he keeps his shop on the Sôk de Barra. Allah bless Larby! Should you want musk, should you want cinnamon, Larby is the man to sell to you. But sometimes he guides Christians to Fez, and then his brother keeps his shop for him."

"But why is the man following us?" I asked.

"My sultan," said Alee, "am I not telling you? Larby is returning home. The Christian he took to Fez, where is he?"

"Yes," I said, "where is he?"

Alee grinned, and answered: "He is gone —southwards, my lord."

"Why should you lie to me like that?" I said. "You know the Christian is dead, and that this Larby was the means of killing him!"

"Shoo! What is my lord saying?" cried Alee, lifting his fat hands with a warning gesture. "What did my lord tell the Basha? My lord must know nothing—nothing. It would not be safe."

Then with glances of fear towards Larby, and dropping his voice to a whisper, Alee added, "It is true the Christian is dead; he died last sunset. Allah corrected him. So Larby is going back alone, going back to his shop, to his house, to his wives, to his little daughter Hoolia. Allah send Larby a safe return. Not following us, Sidi. No, no; Larby is going back the same way—that is all."

The answer did not content me, but I could say no more. Nevertheless, my uneasiness at the man's presence increased hour by hour. I could not think of him without thinking also of the American and of the scene of horror near to the Karueein Mosque. I could not look at him but the blood down my back ran cold. So I called my guide again, and said "Send that man away; I will not have him in our company."

Alee pretended to be deeply wounded. "Sidi," he said, "ask anything else of me. What will you ask? Will you ask me to die for you? I am ready, I am willing, I am satisfied. But Larby is my friend, Larby is my brother, and this thing you ask of me I cannot do. Allah has not written it. Sidi, it cannot be."

With such protestations—the common cant of the country—I had need to be content. But now the impression fixed itself upon my mind that the evil-faced scoundrel who had betrayed the American to his death was not only following *us*, but *me*. Oh! the torment of that idea

in the impatience of my spirit and the racking fever of my nerves! To be dogged day and night as by a bloodhound, never to raise my eyes without the dread of encountering the man's watchful eye—the agony of the incubus was unbearable!

My first thought was merely that the rascal meant robbery. However far I might ride ahead of my own people in the daytime he was always close behind me, and as surely as I wandered away from the camp at nightfall I was overtaken by him or else I met him face to face.

"Alee," I said at last, "that man is a thief."

Of course Alee was horrified. "Ya Allah!" he cried. "What is my lord saying? The Moor is no thief. The Moor is true, the Moor is honest. None so true and honest as the Moor. Wherefore should the Moor be a thief? To be a thief in Barbary is to be a fool. Say I rob a Christian. Good. I kill him and take all he has and bury him in a lonely place. All right. What happens? Behold, Sidi, this is what happens. Your Christian Consul says, 'Where is the Christian you took to Fez?' cannot tell. I lie, I deceive, I make excuses. No use. Your Christian Consul goes to the Kasbah, and says to the Basha: 'Cast that Moor into prison, he is a robber and a murderer!' Then he goes to the Sultan at Marrakesh, in the name of your Queen, who lives in the country of the Nazarenes, over the

sea. 'Pay me twenty thousand dollars,' he says, 'for the life of my Christian who is robbed and murdered.' Just so. The Sultan—Allah preserve our Mulai Hassan!—he pays the dollars. Good, all right, just so. But is that all, Sidi? No, Sidi, that is not all. The Sultan—God prolong the life of our merciful lord!—he then comes to my people, to my Basha, to my bashalic, and he says, 'Pay me back my forty thousand dollars—do you hear me, Sidi, *forty* thousand—for the Nazarene who is dead. All right. But we cannot pay. Good. The Sultan—Allah save him!—he comes, he takes all we have, he puts every man of my people to the sword. We are gone, we are wiped out. Did I not say, Sidi, to be a thief in Barbary is to be a fool?"

It was cold comfort. That the man Larby was following me I was confident, and that he meant to rob me I was at first convinced. Small solace, therefore, in the thought that if the worst befell me, and my boy at home died for want of his father, who lay robbed and murdered in those desolate wastes, my Government would exact a claim in paltry dollars.

My next thought was that the man was merely watching me out of the country. That he was aware that I knew his secret was only too certain; that he had betrayed my knowledge to the authorities at the capital after I had parted from them was more than probable, and it was not impossible that the very men who had taken

bribes of me had in their turn bribed him that he might follow me and see that I did not inform the Ministers and Consuls of foreign countries of the murder of the American in the streets of Fez.

That theory partly reconciled me to the man's presence. Let him watch. His constant company was in its tormenting way my best security. I should go to no Minister, and no Consul should see me. I had too much reason to think of my own living affiairs to busy myself with those of the dead American.

But such poor unction as this reflection brought me was dissipated by a second thought. What security for the man himself, or for the authorities who might have bribed him—or perhaps menaced him—to watch me would lie in the fact that I had passed out of the country without revealing the facts of the crime which I had witnessed? Safely back in England, I might tell all with safety. Once let me leave Morocco with their secret in my breast, and both the penalties these people dreaded might be upon them. Merely to watch me was wasted labour. They meant to do more, or they would have done nothing.

Thinking so, another idea took possession of me with a shock of terror—the man was following me to kill me as the sole Christian witness of the crime that had been committed. By the light of that theory everything became plain. When I visited the Kasbah nothing was known

of my acquaintance with the murdered man. My bribes were taken, and I was allowed to leave Fez in spite of public orders. But then came Larby with alarming intelligence. I had been a friend of the American, and had been seen to speak with him in the public streets. Perhaps Larby himself had seen me, or perhaps my own guide, Alee, had betrayed me to his friend and "brother." At that the Kaid or his Kaleefa had raised their eyebrows and sworn at each other for simpletons and fools. To think that the very man who had intended to betray them had come with an innocent face and a tale of a sick child in England! To think that they had suffered him to slip through their fingers and leave them some paltry bribes of fifty pounds! Fifty pounds taken by stealth against twenty thousand dollars to be plumped down after the Christian had told his story! These Nazarenes were so subtle, and the sons of Ishmael were so simple. But diamond cut diamond. Everything was not lost. One hundred and twenty-five miles this Christian had still to travel before he could sail from Barbary, and not another Christian could he encounter on that journey. Then up, Larby, and after him! God make your way easy! Remember, Larby, remember, good fellow, it is not only the pockets of the people of Fez that are in danger if that Christian should escape. Let him leave the Gharb alive, and your own neck is in peril. You were the spy, you were the informer, you were the hotheaded mad-

man who led the attack that ended in the spilling of Christian blood. If the Sultan should have to pay twenty thousand dollars to the Minister for America at Tangier for the life of this dead dog whom we have grubbed into the earth in a garden, if the Basha of Fez should have to pay forty thousand dollars to the Sultan, if the people should have to pay eighty thousand dollars to the Basha, then you, Larby, you in your turn will have to pay with your *life* to the people. It is *your* life against the life of the Christian. So follow him, watch him, silence him, he knows your secret—away!

Such was my notion of what had happened at the Kasbah of Fez after I had passed the gates of the city. It was a wild vision, but to my distempered imagination it seemed to be a plausible theory. And now Larby, the spy upon the American, Larby, my assassin-elect, Larby, who to save his own life must take mine, Larby was with me, was beside me, was behind me constantly!

(*God help you, my son, God help you!*
Larby! O Larby! Again, again!)

What was I to do? Open my heart to Larby; tell him it was a blunder; that I meant no man mischief; that I was merely hastening back to my sick boy, who was dying for want of me? That was impossible; Larby would laugh in my face, and still follow me. Bribe him? That was useless; Larby would take my money and make the surer of his victim.

It was a difficult problem ; but at length I hit on a solution. Father, you will pity me for a fool when you hear it. I would bargain with Larby as Faust bargained with the devil. He should give me two weeks of life, and come with me to England. I should do my work here, and Larby should never leave my side. My boy's life should be saved by that operation, which I alone knew how to perform. After that Larby and I should square accounts together. He should have all the money I had in the world, and the passport of my name and influence for his return to his own country. I should write a confession of suicide, and then—then—only then—at home—here in my own room—Larby should kill me in order to satisfy himself that his own secret and the secret of his people must be safe for ever.

It was a mad dream, but what dream of dear life is not mad that comes to the man whom death dogs like a bloodhound ? And mad as it was I tried to make it come true. The man was constantly near me, and on the third morning of our journey I drew up sharply, and said—

"Larby!"

"Sidi," he answered.

"Would you not like to go on with me to England ?"

He looked at me with his glittering eyes, and I gave an involuntary shiver. I had awakened the man's suspicions in an instant. He thought

I meant to entrap him. But he only smiled knowingly, shrugged his shoulders, and answered civilly: "I have my shop in the Sôk de Barra, Sidi. And then there are my wives and my sons and my little Hoolia—God be praised for all his blessings."

"Hoolia?" I asked.

"My little daughter, Sidi."

"How old is she?"

"Six, Sidi, only six, but as fair as an angel."

"I daresay she misses you when you are away, Larby," I said.

"You have truth, Sidi. She sits in the Sôk by the tents of the brassworkers and plaits rushes all the day long, and looks over to where the camels come by the saints' houses on the hill, and waits and watches."

"Larby," I said, "I, too, have a child at home who is waiting and watching. A boy, my little Noel, six years of age, just as old as your own little Hoolia. And so bright, so winsome. But he is ill, he is dying, and he is all the world to me. Larby, I am a surgeon, I am a doctor, if I could but reach England——"

It was worse than useless. I stopped, for I could go no farther. The cold glitter of the man's eyes passed over me like frost over flame, and I knew his thought as well as if he had spoken it. "I have heard that story before," he was telling him, "I have heard it at the Kasbah, and it is a lie and a trick."

My plan was folly, and I abandoned it; but

I was more than ever convinced of my theory. This man was following me to kill me. He was waiting an opportunity to do his work safely, secretly, and effectually. His rulers would shield him in his crime, for by that crime they themselves would be shielded.

Father, my theory, like my plan, was foolishness. Only a madman would have dreamt of concealing a crime whereof there was but one witness, by a second crime, whereof the witnesses must have been five hundred. The American had travelled in disguise and cut off the trace of his identity to all men save myself. When he died at the hands of the fanatics, whose faith he had outraged, I alone of all Christians knew that it was Christian blood that had stained the streets of Fez. But how different my own death must have been. I had travelled openly as a Christian and an Englishman. At the consulate of Tangier I was known by name and repute, and at that of Fez I had registered myself. My presence had been notified at every town I had passed through, and the men of my caravan would not have dared to return to their homes without me. In the case of the murder of the American the chances to the Moorish authorities of claim for indemnity were as one to five hundred. In the case of the like catastrophe to myself they must have been as five hundred to one. Thus, in spite of fanaticism and the ineradicable hatred of the Muslem for the Nazarene, Morocco to

me, as to all Christian travellers, travelling openly and behaving themselves properly, was as safe a place as England itself.

But how can a man be hot and cold and wise and foolish in a moment? I was in no humour to put the matter to myself temperately, and, though I had been so cool as to persuade myself that the authorities whom I had bribed could not have been madmen enough to think that they could conceal the murder of the American by murdering me, yet I must have remained convinced that Larby himself was such a madman.

As a surgeon, I had some knowledge of madness, and the cold, clear, steely glitter of the man's eyes when he looked at me was a thing that I could not mistake. I had seen it before in religious monomaniacs. It was an infallible and fatal sign. With that light in the eyes, like the glance of a dagger, men will kill the wives they love, and women will slaughter the children of their bosom. When I saw it in Larby I shivered with a chilly presentiment. It seemed to say that I should see my home no more. I *have* seen my home once more; I am back in England, I am here, but——

(*No, no, not* THAT! *Larby! Don't tell* ME *you did* THAT.)

Father, is my crime so dark? That hour comes back and back. How long will it haunt me? How long? For ever and ever. When time for me is swallowed up in eternity, eternity

will be swallowed up in the memory of that hour. Peace! Do you say peace? Ah! yes, yes; God is merciful!

Before I had spoken to Larby his presence in our company had been only as a dark and fateful shadow. Now it was a foul and hateful incubus. Never in all my life until then had I felt hatred for any human creature. But I hated that man with all the sinews of my soul. What was it to me that he was a madman? He intended to keep me from my dying boy. Why should I feel tenderness towards him because he was the father of his little Hoolia? By killing me he would kill my little Noel.

I began to recall the doctrines of the American as he propounded them on the ship. It was the life of an honest man against the life of a scoundrel. These things should be rated *ad valorem*. If the worst came to the worst, why should I have more respect for this madman's life than for my own?

I looked at the man and measured his strength against mine. He was a brawny fellow with broad shoulders, and I was no better than a weakling. I was afraid of him, but I was yet more afraid of myself. Sometimes I surprised my half-conscious mind in the act of taking out of its silver-mounted sheath the large curved knife which I had bought of the hawker at Tangier, and now wore in the belt of my Norfolk jacket. In my cowardice and my weakness this terrified me. Not all my

borrowed philosophy served to support me against the fear of my own impulses. Meantime, I was in an agony of suspense and dread. The nights brought me no rest and the mornings no freshness.

On the fourth day out of Fez we arrived at Wazzan, and there, though the hour was still early, my men decided to encamp for the night. I protested, and they retorted; I threatened, and they excused themselves. The mules wanted shoeing. I offered to pay double that they might be shod immediately. The tents were torn by a heavy wind of the previous night. I offered to buy new ones. When their trumpery excuses failed them, the men rebelled openly, and declared their determination not to stir out of Wazzan that night.

But they had reckoned without their host this time. I found that there was an English Consul at Wazzan, and I went in search of him. His name was Smith, and he was a typical Englishman—ample, expansive, firm, resolute, domineering, and not troubled with too much sentiment. I told him of the revolt of my people and of the subterfuges whereby they had repeatedly extorted bribes. The good fellow came to my relief. He was a man of purpose, and he had no dying child twelve hundred miles away to make him a fool and a coward.

"Men," he said, "you've got to start away with this gentleman at sundown, and ride night

and day—do you hear me, night and day—until you come to Tangier. A servant of my own shall go with you, and if you stop or delay or halt or go slowly he shall see that every man of you is clapped into the Kasbah as a blackmailer and a thief."

There was no more talk of rebellion. The men protested that they had always been willing to travel. Sidi had been good to them, and they would be good to Sidi. At sundown they would be ready.

"You will have no more trouble, sir," said the Consul; "but I will come back to see you start."

I thanked him and we parted. It was still an hour before sunset, and I turned aside to look at the town. I had barely walked a dozen paces when I came face to face with Larby. In the turmoil of my conflict with the men I had actually forgotten him for one long hour. He looked at me with his glittering eyes, and then his cold, clear gaze followed the Consul as he passed down the street. That double glance was like a shadowy warning. It gave me a shock of terror.

How had I forgotten my resolve to baffle suspicion by exchanging no word or look with any European Minister or Consul as long as I remained in Morocco? The expression in the man's face was not to be mistaken. It seemed to say, "So you have told all; very well, Sidi, we shall see."

With a sense as of creeping and cringing I passed on. The shadow of death seemed to have fallen upon me at last. I felt myself to be a doomed man. That madman would surely kill me. He would watch his chance; I should never escape him; my home would see me no more; my boy would die for want of me.

A tingling noise, as of the jangling of bells, was in my ears. Perhaps it was the tinkling of the bells of the water-carriers, prolonged and unbroken. A gauzy mist danced before my eyes. Perhaps it was the palpitating haze which the sun cast back from the gilded domes and minarets.

Domes and minarets were everywhere in this town of Wazzan. It seemed to be a place of mosques and saints' houses. Where the wide arch and the trough of the mosque were not, there was the open door in the low whitewashed wall of the saint's house, surmounted by its white flag. In my dazed condition, I was sometimes in danger of stumbling into such places unawares. At the instant of recovered consciousness I always remembered the warnings of my guide as I stood by the house of Sidi Gali at Tangier: "Sacred place? Yes, sacred. No Nazarene may enter it. But Muslems, yes Muslems may fly here for sanctuary. Life to the Muslem, death to the Nazarene. So it is."

Oh, it is an awful thing to feel that death is

waiting for you constantly, that at any moment, at any turn, at any corner it may be upon you! Such was my state as I walked on that evening, waiting for the sunset, through the streets of Wazzan. At one moment I was conscious of a sound in my ears above the din of traffic—the *Arrah* of the ass-drivers, the *Bálak* of the men riding mules, and the general clamour of tongues. It was the steady beat of a footstep close behind me. I knew whose footstep it was. I turned about quickly, and Larby was again face to face with me. He met my gaze with the same cold, glittering look. My impulse was to fly at his throat, but that I dare not do. I knew myself to be a coward, and I remembered the Moorish prison.

"Larby," I said, "what do you want?"

"Nothing, Sidi, nothing," he answered.

"Then why are you following me like this?"

"Following you, Sidi?" The fellow raised his eyebrows and lifted both hands in astonishment.

"Yes, following me, dogging me, watching me, tracking me down. What does it mean? Speak out plainly."

"Sidi is jesting," he said, with a mischievous smile. "Is not this Wazzan, the holy city of Wazzan? Sidi is looking at the streets, at the mosques, at the saints' houses. So is Larby. That is all."

One glance at the man's evil eyes would have told you that he lied.

"Which way are you going?" I asked.

"This way." With a motion of the head he indicated the street before him.

"Then I am going this," I said, and I walked away in the opposite direction.

I resolved to return to the English Consul, to tell him everything, and claim his protection. Though all the Moorish authorities in Morocco were in league with this religious monomaniac, yet surely there was life and safety under English power for one whose only offence was that of being witness to a crime which might lead to a claim for indemnity.

(That it should come to this, and I of all men should hear it! God help me! God lead me! God give me light. Light, light, O God; give me light!)

IV

Full of this new purpose and of the vague hope inspired by it, I was making my way back to the house of the Consul, when I came upon two postal couriers newly arrived from Tangier on their way to Fez. They were drawn up, amid a throng of the townspeople, before the palace of the Grand Shereef, and with the Moorish passion for "powder-play" they were firing their matchlocks into the air as salute and signal. Sight of the mail-bags slung at their sides, and of the Shereef's satchel, which they had come some miles out of their course to deliver, suggested the thought that they might be carrying letters for me, which could never come to my hands unless they were given to me now. The couriers spoke some little English. I explained my case to them, and begged them to open their bags and see if anything had been sent forward in my name from Tangier to Fez. True to the phlegmatic character of the Moor in all affairs of common life, they protested that they dare not do so; the bags were tied and sealed, and none dare open them. If there were letters of mine inside they must go on to

Fez, and then return to Tangier. But with the usual results I had recourse to my old expedient; a bribe broke the seals, the bags were searched, and two letters were found for me.

The letters, like those that came to Fez, were one from my wife and one from Wenman. I could not wait till I was alone, but broke open the envelopes and read my letters where I stood. A little crowd of Moors had gathered about me—men, youths, boys, and children—the ragged inhabitants of the streets of the holy city. They seemed to be chaffing and laughing at my expense, but I paid no heed to them.

Just as before, so now, and for the same reason I read Wenman's letter first. I remember every word of it, for every word seemed to burn into my brain like flame.

"My dear fellow," wrote Wenman, "I think it my duty to tell you that your little son is seriously ill."

I knew it—I knew it; who knew it so well as I, though I was more than a thousand miles away?

"It is a strange fact that he is down with the very disease of the throat which you have for so long a time made your especial study. Such, at least, is our diagnosis, assisted by your own discoveries. The case has now reached that stage where we must contemplate the possibility of the operation which

you have performed with such amazing results. Our only uneasiness arises from the circumstance that this operation has hitherto been done by no one except yourself. We have, however, your explanations and your diagrams, and on these we must rely. And, even if you were here, his is not a case in which your own hand should be engaged. Therefore, rest assured, my dear fellow," &c. &c.

Blockheads! If they had not done it already they must not do it at all. I would telegraph from Tangier that I was coming. Not a case for my hand! Fools, fools! It was a case for my hand only.

I did not stop to read the friendly part of Wenman's letter, the good soul's expression of sympathy and solicitude, but in the fever of my impatience, sweating at every pore and breaking into loud exclamations, I tore open the letter from my wife. My eyes swam over the sheet, and I missed much at that first reading, but the essential part of the message stood out before me as if written in red.

"We . . . so delighted . . . your letters. . . . Glad you are having warm beautiful weather . . . Trust . . . make you strong and well. . . . We are having blizzards here . . . snowing to-day . . . I am sorry to tell you, dearest, that our darling is very ill. It is his throat again. This is Friday, and he has grown worse every day since I wrote on Monday. When he can speak he is always calling for you.

He thinks if you were here he would soon be well. He is very weak, for he can take no nourishment, and he has grown so thin, poor little fellow. But he looks very lovely, and every night he says in his prayers, 'God bless papa, and bring him safely home.' . . ."

I could bear no more, the page in my hands was blotted out, and for the first time since I became a man I broke into a flood of tears.

O Omnipotent Lord of Heaven and earth, to think that this child is as life of my life and soul of my soul, that he is dying, that I alone of all men living can save him, and that we are twelve hundred miles apart! Wipe them out, O Lord—wipe out this accursed space dividing us; annihilate it. Thou canst do all, thou canst remove mountains, and this is but a little thing to Thee. Give me my darling under my hands, and I will snatch him out of the arms of death itself.

Did I utter such words aloud out of the great tempest of my trouble? I cannot say; I do not know. Only when I had lifted my eyes from my wife's letter did I become conscious of where I was and what was going on around me. I was still in the midst of the crowd of idlers, and they were grinning, and laughing, and jeering, and mocking at the sight of tears—weak, womanish, stupid tears—on the face of a strong man.

I was ashamed, but I was yet more angry, and to escape from the danger of an outbreak

of my wrath I turned quickly aside, and walked rapidly down a narrow alley. As I did so a second paper dropped to the ground from the sheet of my wife's letter. Before I had picked it up I saw what it was. It was a message from my boy himself, in the handwriting of his nurse.

"He is brighter to-night," the good creature herself wrote at the top of the page, "and he would insist on dictating this letter."

"My dear, dear papa——"

When I had read thus far I was conscious again that the yelling, barking, bleating mob behind were looking after me. To avoid the torment of their gaze I hurried on, passed down a second alley, and then turned into a narrow opening which seemed to be the mouth of a third. But I paid small heed to my footsteps, for all my mind was with the paper which I wished to read. Finding myself in a quiet place at length, I read it. The words were my little darling's own, and I could hear his voice as if he were speaking them—

"My dear, dear papa, I am ill with my throat, and sometimes I can't speak. Last night the ceiling was falling down on me, and the fire was coming up to the bed. But I'm werry nearly all right now. We are going to have a thanksgiving party soon—me, and Jumbo, and Scotty, the puppy. When are you coming home? Do you live in a tent in Morocco? I have a fire in my bed-room: do

you? Write and send me some foreign stamps from Tangier. Are the little boys black in Morocco? Nurse showed me a picture of a lady who lives there, and she's all black except her lips, and her mouth stands out. Have you got a black servant? Have you got a horse to ride on? Is he black? I am tired now. Good night. Mama says I must not tell you to come home quick. Jumbo's all right. He grunts when you shove him along. So good night, papa. + + + + These kisses are all for you. I am so thin.—From your little boy,

"NOEL."

Come home! Yes, my darling, I will come home. Nothing shall stop me now—nothing, nothing! The sun is almost set. Everything is ready. The men must be saddling the horses again. In less than half an hour I shall have started afresh. I will ride all night to-night and all day to-morrow, and in a week I shall be standing by your side. A week! How long! how long! Lord of life and death, keep my boy alive until then!

I became conscious that I was speaking hot words such as these aloud. Even agony like mine has its lucidities of that kind. At the same moment I heard footsteps somewhere behind me. They were slow and steady footsteps, but I knew them too well. The blood rushed to my head and back to my heart. I looked up and around. Where was I? Where? Where?

I was in a little court surrounded by low, white-washed walls. Before me there was an inner compartment roofed by a rude dome. From the apex of this dome there floated a tiny white flag. I was in a saint's house. In the confusion of my mind, and the agonising disarray of all my senses, I had stumbled into the sacred place unawares.

The footsteps came nearer. They seemed to be sounding on the back of my neck. I struggled forward a few paces. By a last mechanical resource of despair I tried to conceal myself in the inner chamber. I was too late. A face appeared in the opening at which I had entered. It was Larby's face, contracted into a grimacing expression.

I read the thought of the man's face as by a flash of light. "Good, Sidi, good! you have done my work as well as my masters. You are a dead man; no one will know, and I need never lift my hand to you."

At the next instant the face was gone. In the moment following I lived a lifetime. My brain did not think; it lightened. I remembered the death of the American in the streets of Fez. I recalled the jeering crowd at the top of the alley. I reflected that Larby was gone to tell the mob that I had dishonoured one of their sanctuaries. I saw myself dragged out, trampled under foot, torn to pieces, and then smuggled away in the dusk on a donkey's back under panniers of filth. My horses ready, my

men waiting, my boy dying for want of me, and myself dead in a dunghill.

"Great Jehovah, lend me Thy strength!" I cried, as I rushed out into the alley. Larby was stealing away with rapid steps. I overtook him; I laid hold of him by the hood of his jellab. He turned upon me. All my soul was roused to uncontrollable fury. I took the man in both my arms, I threw him off his feet, I lifted him by one effort high above my shoulders and flung him to the ground.

He began to cry out, and I sprang upon him again and laid hold of his throat. I knew where to grip, and not a sound could he utter. We were still in the alley, and I put my left hand into the neck of his kaftan and dragged him back into the saint's house. He drew his dagger and lunged at me. I parried the thrust with my foot and broke his arm with my heel. Then there was a moment of horrible bedazzlement. Red flames flashed before me. My head grew dizzy. The whole universe seemed to reel beneath my feet. The man was doubled backwards across my knee. I had drawn my knife—I knew where to strike—and "For my boy, my boy!" I cried in my heart.

It was done. The man died without a groan. His body collapsed in my hands, rolled from my knee, and fell at my feet, doubled up, the head under the neck, the broken arm under the trunk, in a heap, a heap.

(*Oh! oh! Larby! Larby!*)

Then came an awful revulsion of feeling. For a moment I stood looking down, overwhelmed with the horror of my act. In a sort of drunken stupor I gazed at the wide-open eyes, and the grimacing face now fixed in its hideousness by the convulsion of death. O God! O God! what had I done! what had I done!

But I did not cry out. In that awful moment an instinct of self-preservation saved me. The fatal weapon dropped from my hand, and I crept out of the place. My great strength was all gone now. I staggered along, and at every step my limbs grew more numb and stiff.

But in the alley I looked around. I knew no way back to my people except that way by which I came. Down the other alley and through the crowd of idlers I must go. Would they be there still? If so, would they see in my face what I had done?

I was no criminal to mask my crime. In a dull, stupid, drowsy, comatose state I tottered down the alley and through the crowd. They saw me; they recognised me; I knew that they were jeering at me, but I knew no more. "Skaïrî" shouted one, and "Skaïrî" shouted another, and as I staggered away they all shouted "Skaïrî" together.

Father, they called me a drunkard. I was a drunkard indeed, but I was drunk with blood.

The sun had set by this time. Its last rays were rising off the gilded top of the highest

minaret in a golden mist that looked like flame leaping out of a kiln. I saw that, as I saw everything, through a palpitating haze.

When at length I reached the place where I had left my people I found the horses saddled, the mules with their burdens packed on their panniers, the men waiting, and everything ready. Full well I knew that I ought to leap to my seat instantly and be gone without delay; but I seemed to have lost all power of prompt action. I was thinking of what I wanted to do, but I could not do it. The men spoke to me, and I know that I looked vacantly into their faces and did not answer. One said to another, "Sidi is grown deaf." The other touched his forehead and grinned.

I was fumbling with the stirrup of my saddle when the English Consul came up and hailed me with cheerful spirits. By an effort that was like a spasm I replied.

"Allow me, doctor," he said, and he offered his knee that I might mount.

"Ah, no, no," I stammered, and I scrambled to my seat.

While I was fumbling with my double rein I saw that he was looking at my hand.

"You've cut your fingers, doctor," he said.

There was blood on them. The blood was not mine, but a sort of mechanical cunning came to my relief. I took out my handkerchief and made pretence to bind it about my hand.

Alee, the guide, was at my right side settling

my lumbering foot in my stirrup. I felt him touch the sheath of my knife, and then I remembered that it must be empty.

"Sidi has lost his dagger," he said. "Look!"

The Consul, who had been on my left, wheeled round by the horse's head, glanced at the useless sheath that was stuck in the belt of my jacket, and then looked back into my stupid face.

"Sidi is ill," he said quietly; "ride quickly, my men, lose no time, get him out of the country without delay!"

I heard Alee answer, "Right—all right!"

Then the Consul's servant rode up—he was a Berber—and took his place at the head of our caravan.

"All ready?" asked the Consul, in Arabic.

"Ready," the men answered.

"Then away, as if you were flying for your lives!"

The men put spurs to their mules, Alee gave the lash to my horse, and we started.

"Good-bye, doctor," cried the Consul; "may you find your little son better when you reach home!"

I shouted some incoherent answer in a thick, loud voice, and in a few minutes more we were galloping across the plain outside the town.

The next two hours are a blank in my memory. In a kind of drunken stupor I rode on and on. The grey light deepened into the

darkness of night, and the stars came out. Still we rode and rode. The moon appeared in the southern sky and rose into the broad whiteness of the stars overhead. Then consciousness came back to me, and with it came the first pangs of remorse. Through the long hours of that night-ride one awful sight stood up constantly before my eyes. It was the sight of that dead body stark and cold lying within that little sanctuary behind me, white now with the moonlight, and silent with the night.

(O Larby, Larby! You shamed your father. You drove him from the world. You brought down your mother to the grave. And yet, and yet—must I absolve your murderer?)

Father, I reached my home at last. At Gibraltar I telegraphed that I was coming, and at Dover I received a telegram in reply. Four days had intervened between the despatch of my message and the receipt of my wife's. Anything might have happened in that time, and my anxiety was feverish. Stepping on to the Admiralty Pier, I saw a telegraph boy bustling about among the passengers from the packet with a telegram in his hand.

"What name?" I asked.

He gave one that was not my own and yet sounded like it.

I looked at the envelope. Clearly the name was intended for mine. I snatched the telegram out of the boy's hand. It ran—

"Welcome home; boy very weak, but not beyond hope."

I think I read the words aloud, amid all the people, so tremendous was my relief, and so overwhelming my joy. The messenger got a gold coin for himself, and I leapt into the train.

At Charing Cross I did not wait for my luggage, but gave a foolish tip to a porter and told him to send my things after me. Within half a minute of my arrival I was driving out of the station.

What I suffered during those last moments of waiting before I reached my house no tongue of man could tell. I read my wife's telegram again, and observed for the first time that it was now six hours old. Six hours! They were like six days to my tortured mind. From the moment when we turned out of Oxford Street until we drew up at my own door in Wimpole Street I did not once draw breath. And being here I dare hardly lift my eyes to the window lest the blinds should be down.

I had my latchkey with me, and I let myself in without ringing. A moment afterwards I was in my darling's room. My beloved wife was with our boy, and he was unconscious. That did not trouble me at all, for I saw at a glance that I was not too late. Throwing off my coat, I sent to the surgery for my case, dismissed my dear girl with scant embraces, drew my darling's cot up to the window, and tore down the curtains

that kept out the light, for the spring day was far spent.

Then, being alone with my darling, I did my work. I had trembled like an aspen leaf until I entered his room, but when my time came my hand was as firm as a rock and my pulse beat like a child's.

I knew I could do it, and I did it. God had spared me to come home, and I had kept my vow. I had travelled ten days and nights to tackle the work, but it was a short task when once begun.

After I had finished I opened the door to call my wife back to the room. The poor soul was crouching with the boy's nurse on the threshold, and they were doing their utmost to choke their sobs.

"There!" I cried, "there's your boy! He'll be all right now."

The mischief was removed, and I had never a doubt of the child's recovery.

My wife flung herself on my breast, and then I realised the price I had paid for so much nervous tension. All the nerves of organic life seemed to collapse in an instant.

"I'm dizzy; lead me to my room," I said.

My wife brought me brandy, but my hand could not lift the tumbler to my mouth, and when my dear girl's arms had raised my own the glass rattled against my teeth. They put me to bed; I was done—done.

(*God will forgive him. Why should not I?*)

Father, that was a month ago, and I am lying here still. It is not neurasthenia of the body that is killing me, but neurasthenia of the soul. No doctor's drug will ever purge me of that. It is here like fire in my brain, and here like ice in my heart. Was my awful act justifiable before God? Was it right in the eyes of Him who has written in the tables of His law, *Thou shalt do no murder?* Was it murder? Was it crime? If I outraged the letter of the holy edict, did I also wrong its spirit?

Speak, speak, for pity's sake, speak. Have mercy upon me, as you hope for mercy. Think where I was and what fate was before me Would I do it again in spite of all? Yes, yes, a thousand, thousand times, yes. I will go to God with that word on my lips, and He shall judge me.

And yet I suffer these agonies of doubt. Life was always a sacred thing to me. God gave it, and only God should take it away. He who spilt the blood of his fellow-man took the government of the world out of God's hands. And then—and then—Father, have I not told you all?

(*Yes, yes, the Father of all Fathers will pardon him.*)

On the day when I arrived at Tangier from Fez I had some two hours to wait for the French steamer from Malaga that was to take

me to Cadiz. In order to beguile my mind of its impatience, I walked through the town as far as the outer Sôk—the Sôk de Barra. It was market day, Thursday, and the place was the same animated and varied scene as I had looked upon before. Crushing my way through the throng, I came upon the saint's house near the middle of the market. The sight of the little white structure with its white flag brought back the tragedy I saw enacted there, and the thought of that horror was now made hellish to my conscience by the memory of another tragedy at another saint's house.

I turned quickly aside, and stepping up to the elevated causeway that runs in front of the tents of the brass-workers, I stood awhile and watched the Jewish workmen hammering the designs on their trays. Presently I became aware of a little girl who was sitting on a bundle of rushes and plaiting them into a chain. She was a tiny thing, six years of age at the utmost, but with the sober look of a matron. Her sweet face was of the colour of copper, and her quiet eyes were deep blue. A yellow gown of some light fabric covered her body, but her feet were bare. She worked at her plaiting with steady industry, and as often as she stopped to draw a rush from the bundle beneath her she lifted her eyes and looked with a wistful gaze over the feeding-ground of the camels, and down the lane to the bridge, and up by the big

house on the hillside to where the sandy road goes off to Fez.

The little demure figure, amid so many romping children, interested and touched me. This was noticed by a Jewish brassworker before whose open booth I stood, and he smiled and nodded his head in the direction of the little woman.

"Dear little Sobersides," I said; "does she never play with other children?"

"No," said the Jew, "she sits here every day, and all day long—that is, when her father is away."

"Whose child is she?" I asked. An awful thought had struck me.

"A great rascal's," the Jew answered, "though the little one is such an angel. He keeps a spice shop over yonder, but he is a guide as well as a merchant, and when he is out on a journey the child sits here and waits and watches for his coming home again. She can catch the first sight of travellers from this place, and she knows her father at any distance. See!—do you know where she's looking now? Over the road by El Minzah—that's the way from Fez. Her father has gone there with a Christian."

The sweat was bursting from my forehead.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"The Moors call him Larby," said the Jew, "and the Christians nickname him Ananias.

They say he is a Spanish renegade, escaped from Ceuta, who witnessed to the Prophet and married a Moorish wife. But he's everything to the little one—bless her innocent face! Look! do you see the tiny brown dish at her side? That's for her drinking water. She brings it full every day, and also a little cake of bread for her dinner. She's never tired of waiting, and if Larby does not come home to-night she'll be here in the morning. I do believe that if anything happened to Larby she would wait until doomsday."

My throat was choking me, and I could not speak. The Jew saw my emotion, but he showed no surprise. I stepped up to the little one and stroked her glossy black hair.

"Hoolia?" I said.

She smiled back into my face and answered, "Iyyeh"—yes.

I could say no more; I dare not look into her trustful eyes and think that he whom she waited for would never come again. I stooped and kissed the child, and then fled away.

(*God show me my duty. The Priest or the Man—which?*)

Listen! do you hear him? That's the footstep of my boy overhead. My darling! He is well again now. My little sunny laddie! He came into my bed-room this morning with a hop, skip, and a jump—a gleam of sunshine. Poor innocent, thoughtless boy. They will take him into the country soon, and he will romp in the

lanes and chase the birds in the garden. My son, my son! He has drained my life away; he has taken all my strength. Do I wish that I had it back? Yes, but only—yes, only that I might give it him again. Hark! That's his voice, that's his laughter. How happy he is! When I think how soon—how very soon—when I think that I——

God sees all. He is looking down on little Hoolia waiting, waiting, waiting where the camels come over the hill, and on my little Noel laughing and prancing in the room above us.

Father, I have told you all at last. There are tears in your eyes, father. You are crying. Tell me, then, what hope is left? You know my sin, and you know my suffering. Did I do wrong? Did I do right?

> *My son, God's law was made for man, not man for His law. If the spirit has been broken where the letter has been kept, the spirit may be kept where the letter has been broken. Your earthly father dare not judge you. To your Heavenly Father he must leave both the deed and the circumstance. It is for Him to justify or forgive. If you are innocent, He will place your hand in the hand of him who slew the Egyptian and yet looked on the burning bush. And if you are guilty, He will not shut His ears to the cry of your despair.*

He has gone. I could not tell him. It would have embittered his parting hour; it would have poisoned the wine of the sacrament. O, Larby! Larby! flesh of my flesh, my sorrow, my shame, my prodigal—my son.

THE BLIND MOTHER

THE BLIND MOTHER

I

The Vale of Newlands lay green in the morning sunlight; the river that ran through its lowest bed sparkled with purple and amber; the leaves prattled low in the light breeze that soughed through the rushes and the long grass; the hills rose sheer and white to the smooth blue lake of the sky, where only one fleecy cloud floated languidly across from peak to peak. Out of unseen places came the bleating of sheep and the rumble of distant cataracts, and above the dull thud of tumbling waters far away was the thin carolling of birds overhead.

But the air was alive with yet sweeter sounds. On the breast of the fell that lies over against Cat Bell a procession of children walked, and sang, and chattered, and laughed. It was St. Peter's Day, and they were rush-bearing: little ones of all ages, from the comely girl of fourteen (just ripening into maidenhood) who walked

last, to the sweet boy of four in the pinafore braided with epaulettes, who strode along gallantly in front. Most of the little hands carried rushes, but some were filled with ferns and mosses, and flowers. They had assembled at the schoolhouse, and now, on their way to the church, they were making the circuit of the dale.

They passed over the road that crosses the river at the head of Newlands, and turned down into the path that follows the bed of the valley. At that angle there stands a little group of cottages, deliciously cool in their whitewash, nestling together under the heavy purple crag from which the waters of a ghyll fall into a deep basin that reaches to their walls. The last of the group is a cottage with its end to the road, and its open porch facing a garden shaped like a wedge. As the children passed this house an old man, grey and thin and much bent, stood by the gate, leaning on a staff. A collie, with the sheep dog's wooden bar suspended from its shaggy neck, lay at his feet. The hum of voices brought a young woman into the porch. She was bare-headed and wore a light print gown. Her face was pale and marked with lines. She walked cautiously, stretching one hand before her with an uncertain motion, and grasping a trailing tendril of honeysuckle that swept downward from the roof. Her eyes, which were partly inclined upwards and partly turned towards the procession, had a

vague light in their bleached pupils. She was blind. At her side, and tugging at her other hand, was a child of a year and a half—a chubby, sunny little fellow with ruddy cheeks, blue eyes, and fair curly hair. Prattling, laughing, singing snatches, and waving their rushes and ferns above their happy, thoughtless heads, the children rattled past. When they were gone the air was empty, as it is when the lark stops in its song.

After the procession of children had passed the little cottage at the angle of the roads, the old man who leaned on his staff at the gate turned about and stepped to the porch.

"Did the boy see them?—did he see the children?" said the young woman who held the child by the hand.

"I mak' na doot," said the old man.

He stooped to the little one and held out one long withered finger. The soft baby hand closed on it instantly.

"Did he laugh? I thought he laughed," said the young woman.

A bright smile played on her lips.

"May be so, lass."

"Ralphie has never seen the children before, father. Didn't he look frightened—just a little bit frightened—at first, you know? I thought he crept behind my gown."

"Maybe, maybe."

The little one had dropped the hand of his young mother, and, still holding the bony finger

of his grandfather, he toddled beside him into the house.

Very cool and sweet was the kitchen, with whitewashed walls and hard earthen floor. A table and a settle stood by the window, and a dresser that was an armoury of bright pewter dishes, trenchers, and piggins, crossed the opposite wall.

"Nay, but sista here, laal lad," said the old man, and he dived into a great pocket at his side.

"Have you brought it? Is it the kitten? Oh, dear, let the boy see it!"

A kitten came out of the old man's pocket, and was set down on the rug at the hearth. The timid creature sat dazed, then raised itself on its hind legs and mewed.

"Where's Ralphie? Is he watching it, father. What is he doing?"

The little one had dropped on hands and knees before the kitten, and was gazing up into its face.

The mother leaned over him with a face that would have beamed with sunshine if the sun of sight had not been missing.

"Is he looking? Doesn't he want to coddle it?"

The little chap had pushed his nose close to the nose of the kitten, and was prattling to it in various inarticulate noises.

"Boo—loo—lal-la—mama."

"Isn't he a darling, father?"

"It's a winsome wee thing," said the old man, still standing with drooping head, over the group on the hearth.

The mother's face saddened, and she turned away. Then from the opposite side of the kitchen, where she was making pretence to take plates from a plate-rack, there came the sound of suppressed weeping. The old man's eyes followed her.

"Nay, lass; let's have a sup of broth," he said, in a tone that carried another message.

The young woman put plates and a bowl of broth on the table.

"To think that I can never see my own child, and everybody else can see him!" she said, and then there was another bout of tears.

The charcoal-burner supped at his broth in silence. A glistening bead rolled slowly down his wizened cheek; and the interview on the hearth went on without interruption:

"Mew—mew—mew. Boo—loo—lal-la—mama."

The child made efforts to drag himself to his feet by laying hold of the old man's trousers.

"Nay, laddie," said the old man, "mind my claes—they'll dirty thy bran-new brat for thee."

The mother took the child from her father's feet, and, sitting on the sconce bench with it she held a broken piece of a mirror before its face, and then listened for its laugh when it saw itself in the glass.

"Is he growing, father?" said the girl.

"Growing?—amain."

"And his eyes—are they changing colour?—going brown? Children's eyes do, you know."

"Maybe—I'll not be for saying nay."

"Is he—is he *very* like me, father?"

"Nay—well—nay—I's fancying I see summat of the stranger in the laal chap at whiles."

The young mother turned her head aside.

* * * * *

The old man's name was Matthew Fisher; but the folks of the country-side called him Laird Fisher. This dubious dignity came of the circumstance that he had been the holder of an absolute royalty in a few acres of land under Hindscarth. The royalty had been many generations in his family. His grandfather had set store by it. When the Lord of the Manor had worked the copper pits at the foot of the Eel Crags, he had tried to possess himself of the royalties of the Fishers. But the peasant family resisted the aristocrat. Luke Fisher believed there was a fortune under his feet, and he meant to try his luck on his holding some day. That day never came. His son, Mark Fisher, carried on the tradition, but made no effort to unearth the fortune. They were a cool, silent, slow, and stubborn race. Matthew Fisher followed his father and his grandfather

and inherited the family pride. All these years the tenders of the Lord of the Manor were ignored, and the Fishers enjoyed their title of courtesy or badinage. Matthew married, and had one daughter called Mercy. He farmed his few acres with poor results. The ground was good enough, but Matthew was living under the shadow of the family tradition. One day—it was Sunday morning, and the sun shone brightly—he was rambling by the Po Beck that rises on Hindscarth, and passed through his land, when his eye glanced over a glittering stone that lay among the pebbles at the bottom of the stream. It was ore, good full ore, and on the very surface. Then the Laird sank a shaft, and all his earnings with it, in an attempt to procure iron or copper. The dalespeople derided him, but he held silently on his way.

"How dusta find the cobbles to-day—any softer?" they would say in passing.

"As soft as the hearts of most folk," he would answer; and then add in a murmur, "and maybe a vast harder nor their heads."

The undeceiving came at length, and then the Laird Fisher was old and poor. His wife died broken-hearted. After that the Laird never rallied. The shaft was left unworked, and the holding lay fallow. Laird Fisher took wage from the Lord of the Manor to burn charcoal in the wood. The breezy irony of the dalesfolk did not spare the old man's bent head.

There was a rhyme current in the vale which ran—

> "There's t'auld laird, and t'young laird, and t'laird among t'barns,
> If iver there comes another laird, we'll hang him up by t'arms."

A second man came to Matthew's abandoned workings. He put money into it and skill and knowledge, struck a vein, and began to realise a fortune. The only thing he did for the old Laird was to make him his banksman at a pound a week—the only thing save one thing, and that is the beginning of this story.

The man's name was Hugh Ritson. He was the second son of a Cumbrian statesman in a neighbouring valley, was seven-and-twenty, and had been brought up as a mining engineer, first at Cleaton Moor and afterwards at the College in Jermyn Street. When he returned to Cumberland and bought the old Laird's holding he saw something of the old Laird's daughter. He remembered Mercy as a pretty prattling thing of ten or eleven. She was now a girl of eighteen, with a simple face, a timid manner, and an air that was neither that of a woman nor of a child. Her mother was lately dead, her father spent most of his days on the fell (some of his nights also when the charcoal was burning), and she was much alone. Hugh Ritson liked her sweet face, her gentle replies, and her few simple questions. It is unnecessary to go farther. The girl gave herself up to him with her whole

heart and soul. Then he married another woman.

The wife was the daughter of the Vicar, Parson Christian. Her name was Greta: she was beautiful to look upon—a girl of spirit and character. Greta knew nothing of Hugh Ritson's intercourse with Mercy until after he had become her husband. Mercy was then in the depth of her trouble, and Greta had gone to comfort her. Down to that hour, though idle tongues had wagged, no one had lit on Mercy's lover, and not even to her father had she confessed. Greta told her that it was brave and beautiful to shield her friend, but he was unworthy of her friendship or he would stand by her side—who was he? It was a trying moment. Greta urged and pleaded and coaxed, and Mercy trembled and stammered and was silent. The truth came out at last, and from that moment the love between the two women was like the love of David and Jonathan. Hugh Ritson was compelled to stand apart and witness it. He might not recognise it; he dare not oppose it; he could only drop his head and hold his tongue. It was coals of fire on his head from both sides. The women never afterwards mentioned him to each other, and yet somehow—by a paradox of love—he was the bond between them.

A month before the birth of the child, Mercy became blind. This happened suddenly and without much warning. A little cold in the

eyes, a little redness around them and then total eclipse of sight. If such a disaster had befallen a married wife, looking forward to a happy motherhood, death itself might have seemed a doom more kind. But Mercy took it with a sombre quietness. She was even heard to say that it was just as well. These startling words, repeated to Greta first told her something of the mystery and misery of Mercy's state. But their full meaning, the whole depth of the shame they came from, were only revealed on the morning after the night on which Mercy's child was born.

They were in the room upstairs, where Mercy herself had been born less than nineteen years before : a little chamber with the low eaves and the open roof rising to the ridge : a peaceful place with its white-washed walls and the odour of clean linen. On the pillow of the bed lay the simple face of the girl-mother, with the fair hair hanging loose and the blind eyes closed. Mercy had just awakened from the first deep sleep that comes after all is over, and the long fingers of one of her thin hands were plucking at the white counterpane. In a nervous voice she began to speak. Where was Mrs. Ritson? Greta answered that she was there, and the baby was sleeping on her knee. Anybody else there? No, nobody else. Was it morning? Yes, it was eight in the morning, and her father, who had not been to bed, had eaten his breakfast, and lit his pipe and gone to work Was the

day fine? Very fine. And the sun shining? Yes, shining beautifully. Was the blind down? Yes, the little white blind was down. Then all the room was full of that soft light? Oh yes, full of it. Except in the corner by the washstand? Well, except in the corner. Was the washstand still there? Why, yes, it was still there. And mother's picture on the wall above it? Oh dear, yes. And the chest of drawers near the door with the bits of sparkling lead ore on top? Of course. And the texts pinned on to the wall-paper: "Come unto Me"—eh? Yes, they were all there. Then everything was just the same? Oh yes, everything the same.

"The same," cried Mercy, "everything the same, but, O Lord Jesus, how different!"

The child was awakened by the shrill sound of her voice, and it began to whimper, and Greta to hush it, swaying it on her knee, and calling it by a score of pretty names. Mercy raised her head a moment and listened, then fell back to the pillow and said, "How glad I am I'm blind?"

"Good gracious, Mercy, what are you saying?" said Greta.

"I'm glad I can't see it."

"Mercy!"

"Ah, you're different, Mrs. Ritson. I was thinking of that last night. When your time comes perhaps you'll be afraid you'll die, but you'll never be afraid you'll not. And you'll say to yourself, 'It will be over soon, and then

what joy!' That wasn't my case. When I was at the worst I could only think, 'It's dreadful now, but oh, to-morrow all the world will be different.'"

One poor little day changed all this. Towards sunset the child had to be given the breast for the first time. Ah! that mystery of life, that mystery of motherhood, what are the accidents of social law, the big conventions of virtue and vice, of honour and disgrace, before the touch of the spreading fingers of a babe as they fasten on the mother's breast! Mercy thought no more of her shame. She had her baby for it, at all events. The world was not utterly desolate. After all, God was very good.

Then came a great longing for sight. She only wished to see her child. That was all. Wasn't it hard that a mother had never seen her own baby? In her darkness she would feel its little nose as it lay asleep beside her, and let her hand play around its mouth and across its eyes and about its ears. Her touch passed over the little one like a look. It was almost as if there were sight in the tips of her fingers.

The child lived to be six months old, and still Mercy had not seen him; a year, and yet she had no hope. Then Greta, in pity of the yearning gaze of the blind girl-face whenever she came and kissed the boy and said how bonny he was, sent to Liverpool for a doctor, that at least they might know for a certainty

if Mercy's sight was gone for ever. The doctor came. Yes, there was hope. The mischief was cataract on both eyes. Sight might return, but an operation would be necessary. That could not, however, be performed immediately. He would come again in a month, and a colleague with him, and meantime the eyes must be bathed constantly in a liquid which they would send for the purpose.

At first Mercy was beside herself with delight. She plucked up the boy and kissed and kissed him. The whole day long she sang all over the house like a liberated bird. Her face, though it was blind, was like sunshine, for the joyous mouth smiled like eyes. Then suddenly there came a change. She plucked up the boy and kissed him still, but she did not sing and she did not smile. A heavy thought had come to her. Ah! if she should die under the doctor's hands! Was it not better to live in blindness and keep her boy than to try to see him and so lose him altogether? Thus it was with her on St. Peter's Day when the children of the dale went by at their rush-bearing.

* * * * *

There was the faint sound of a footstep outside.

"Hark," said Mercy, half rising from the sconce. "It's Mrs. Ritson's foot."

The old man listened. "Nay, lass, there's no foot," said Matthew.

"Yes, she's on the road," said Mercy. Her face showed that pathetic tension of the other senses which is peculiar to the blind. A moment later Greta stepped into the cottage, with a letter in her hand. "Good-morning, Matthew; I have news for you, Mercy. The doctors are coming to-day."

Mercy's face fell perceptibly. The old man's head drooped lower.

"There, don't be afraid," said Greta, touching her hand caressingly. "It will soon be over. The doctors didn't hurt you before, did they?"

"No, but this time it will be the operation," said Mercy. There was a tremor in her voice.

Greta had lifted the child from the sconce. The little fellow cooed close to her ear; and babbled his inarticulate nothings.

"Only think, when it's all over you will be able to see your darling Ralphie for the first time!"

Mercy's sightless face brightened. "Oh, yes," she said, "and watch him play, and see him spin his tops and chase the butterflies. Oh, that will be very good!"

"Dusta say to-day, Mistress Ritson?" asked Matthew, the big drops standing in his eyes.

"Yes, Matthew; I will stay to see it over, and mind baby, and help a little."

Mercy took the little one from Greta's arms and cried over it, and laughed over it, and then

cried and laughed again. "Mamma and Ralphie shall play together in the garden, darling; and Ralphie shall see the horses—and the flowers—and the birdies—and mamma—yes, mamma shall see *Ralphie*.'

II

Two hours later the doctors arrived. They looked at Mercy's eyes, and were satisfied that the time was ripe for the operation. At the sound of their voices, Mercy trembled and turned livid. By a maternal instinct she picked up the child, who was toddling about the floor, and clasped it to her bosom. The little one opened wide his blue eyes at sight of the strangers, and the prattling tongue became quiet.

"Take her to her room, and let her lie on the bed," said one of the doctors to Greta.

A sudden terror seized the young mother. "No, no, no!" she said, in an indescribable accent, and the child cried a little from the pressure to her breast.

"Come, Mercy, dear, be brave for your boy's sake," said Greta.

"Listen to me," said the doctor quietly but firmly. "You are now quite blind, and you have been in total darkness for more than a year and a half. We may be able to restore your sight by giving you a few minutes' pain. Will you not bear it?"

Mercy sobbed, and kissed the child passionately.

"Just think, it is quite certain that without an operation you will never regain your sight," continued the doctor. "You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Are you satisfied? Come, go away to your room quietly."

"Oh, oh, oh!" sobbed Mercy.

"Just imagine, only a few minutes' pain, and even of that you will scarcely be conscious. Before you know what is doing, it will be done."

Mercy clung closer to her child, and kissed it again and yet more fervently.

The doctors turned to each other. "Strange vanity!" muttered the one who had not spoken before. "Her eyes are useless, and yet she is afraid she may lose them."

Mercy's quick ears caught the whispered words. "It is not that," she said, passionately.

"No, gentlemen," said Greta, "you have mistaken her thought. Tell her she runs no danger of her life."

The doctors smiled and laughed a little. "Oh, that's it, eh? Well, we can tell her that with certainty."

Then there was another interchange of half-amused glances.

"Ah, we that be men, sirs, don't know the depth and tenderness of a mother's heart," said old Matthew. And Mercy turned towards him

a face that was full of gratitude. Greta took the child out of her arms and hushed it to sleep in another room. Then she brought it back and put it in its cradle that stood in the ingle.

"Come, Mercy," she said, "for the sake of your boy." And Mercy permitted herself to be led from the kitchen.

"So there will be no danger," she said. "I shall not leave my boy. Who said that? The doctor? Oh, good gracious, it's nothing. Only think, I shall live to see him grow to be a great lad."

Her whole face was now radiant.

"It will be nothing. Oh, no, it will be nothing. How silly it was to think that he would live on, and grow up, and be a man, and I lie cold in the churchyard—and me his mother! That was very childish, wasn't it? But, then, I have been so childish since Ralphie came."

"There, lie and be quiet, and it will soon be over," said Greta.

"Let me kiss him first. Do let me kiss him! Only once. You know it's a great risk after all. And if he grew up—and I wasn't here—if—if——"

"There, dear Mercy, you must not cry again. It inflames your eyes, and that can't be good for the doctors."

"No, no, I won't cry. You are very good; everybody is very good. Only let me kiss my little Ralphie—just for the last."

Greta led her back to the side of the cot,

and she spread herself over it with outstretched arms, as the mother-bird poises with outstretched wings over her brood. Then she rose, and her face was peaceful and resigned.

The Laird Fisher sat down before the kitchen fire, with one arm on the cradle head.

The doctors followed into the bedroom. Mercy was lying tranquilly on her bed. Her countenance was without expression. She was busy with her own thoughts. Greta stood by the bedside; anxiety was written in every line of her beautiful, brave face.

"We must give her the gas," said one of the doctors, addressing the other.

Mercy's features twitched.

"Who said that?" she asked nervously.

"My child, you must be quiet," said the doctor in a tone of authority.

"Yes, I will be quiet, very quiet; only don't make me unconscious," she said. "Never mind me; I will not cry. No; if you hurt me I will not cry out. I will not stir. I will do everything you ask. And you shall say how quiet I have been. Only don't let me be insensible."

The doctors consulted together aside, and in whispers.

"Who spoke about the gas? It wasn't you, Mrs. Ritson, was it?"

"You must do as the doctors wish, dear," said Greta in a caressing voice.

"Oh, I will be very good. I will do every little thing. Yes, and I will be so brave. I

am a little childish sometimes, but I *can* be brave, can't I ?"

The doctors returned to the bedside.

"Very well, we will not use the gas," said one. "You are a brave little woman, after all. There, be still—very still."

One of the doctors was tearing linen into strips for bandages, while the other fixed Mercy's head to suit the light.

There was a faint sound from the kitchen. "Wait," said Mercy. "That is father—he's crying. Tell him not to cry. Say it's nothing."

She laughed a weak little laugh.

"There, he will hear that; go and say it was I who laughed."

Greta left the room on tiptoe. Old Matthew was still sitting over a dying fire, gently rocking the sleeping child.

When Greta returned to the bedroom, Mercy called her, and said, very softly, "Let me hold your hand, Greta—may I say Greta ?—there," and her fingers closed on Greta's with a convulsive grasp.

The operation began. Mercy held her breath. She had the stubborn north-country blood in her. Once only a sigh escaped. There was a dead silence.

In two or three minutes the doctor said, "Just another minute, and all will be over."

At the next instant Greta felt her hand held with a grasp of iron.

"Doctor, doctor, I can see you," cried Mercy, and her words came in gusts.

"Be quiet," said the doctor in a stern voice. In half a minute more the linen bandages were being wrapped tightly over Mercy's eyes.

"Doctor, dear doctor, let me see my boy!" cried Mercy.

"Be quiet, I say," said the doctor again.

"Dear doctor, my dear doctor, only one peep —one little peep. I saw your face—let me see my Ralphie's."

"Not yet, it is not safe."

"But only for a moment. Don't put the bandage on for one moment. Just think, doctor, I have never seen my boy; I've seen other people's children, but never once my own, own darling. Oh, dear doctor——"

"You are exciting yourself. Listen to me: if you don't behave yourself now you may never see your child."

"Yes, yes, I will behave myself; I will be very good. Only don't shut me up in darkness again until I see my boy. Greta, bring him to me. Listen, I hear his breathing. Go for my darling! The kind doctor won't be angry with you. Tell him that if I see my child it will cure me. I know it will."

Greta's eyes were swimming in tears.

"Rest quiet, Mercy. Everything may be lost if you disturb yourself now, my dear."

The doctors were wrapping bandage over

bandage, and fixing them firmly at the back of their patient's head.

"Now listen again," said one of them. "This bandage must be kept over your eyes for a week."

"A week—a whole week? Oh, doctor, you might as well say for ever."

"I say a week. And if you should ever remove it——"

"Not for an instant? Not raise it a very little?"

"If you ever remove it for an instant, or raise it ever so little, you will assuredly lose your sight for ever. Remember that."

"Oh, doctor, it is terrible. Why did you not tell me so before? Oh, this is worse than blindness! Think of the temptation, and I have never seen my boy!"

The doctor had fixed the bandage, and his voice was less stern, but no less resolute.

"You must obey me," he said; "I will come again this day week, and then you shall see your child, and your father, and this young lady, and everybody. But mind, if you don't obey me, you will never see anything. You will have one glance of your little boy, and then be blind for ever, or perhaps—yes, perhaps *die*."

Mercy lay quiet for a moment. Then she said, in a low voice:

"Dear doctor, you must forgive me. I am very wilful, and I promised to be so good. I

will not touch the bandage. No, for the sake of my little boy, I will never, never touch it. You shall come yourself and take it off, and then I shall see him."

The doctors went away. Greta remained all that night in the cottage.

"You are happy now, Mercy?" said Greta.

"Oh yes," said Mercy. "Just think, only a week! And he must be so beautiful by this time."

When Greta took the child to her at sunset, there was an ineffable joy in her pale face, and next morning, when Greta awoke, Mercy was singing softly to herself in the sunrise.

III

Greta stayed with Mercy until noon that day, begging, entreating, and finally commanding her to lie quiet in bed, while she herself dressed and fed the child, and cooked and cleaned, in spite of the Laird Fisher's protestations. When all was done, and the old charcoal-burner had gone out on the hills, Greta picked up the little fellow in her arms and went to Mercy's room. Mercy was alert to every sound, and in an instant was sitting up in bed. Her face beamed, her parted lips smiled, her delicate fingers plucked nervously at the counterpane.

"How brightsome it is to-day, Greta," she said. "I'm sure the sun must be shining."

The window was open, and a soft breeze floated through the sun's rays into the room. Mercy inclined her head aside, and added, "Ah, you young rogue, you; you are there, are you? Give him to me, the rascal." The rogue was set down in his mother's arms ,and she proceeded to punish his rascality with a shower of kisses. "How bonny his cheeks must be; they will be just like two ripe apples," and forthwith there fell another shower of

kisses. Then she babbled over the little one, and lisped, and stammered, and nodded her head in his face, and blew little puffs of breath into his hair, and tickled him until he laughed and crowed and rolled and threw up his legs; and then she kissed his limbs and extremities in a way that mothers have, and finally imprisoned one of his feet by putting it ankle-deep into her mouth. "Would you ever think a foot could be so tiny, Greta?" she said. And the little one plunged about and clambered laboriously up its mother's breast, and more than once plucked at the white bandage about her head. "No, no, Ralphie must not touch," said Mercy with sudden gravity. "Only think, Ralphie pet, one week—only one—nay, less—only six days now, and then—oh, then——!" A long hug, and the little fellow's boisterous protest against the convulsive pressure abridged the mother's prophecy.

All at once Mercy's manner changed. She turned towards Greta, and said, "I will not touch the bandage, no, never; but if Ralphie tugged at it, and it fell—would that be breaking my promise?"

Greta saw what was in her heart.

"I'm afraid it would, dear," she said, but there was a tremor in her voice.

Mercy sighed audibly.

"Just think, it would be only Ralphie. The kind doctors could not be angry with my little child. I would say, 'It was the boy,' and

they would smile and say, 'Ah, that is different.'"

"Give me the little one," said Greta with emotion.

Mercy drew the child closer, and there was a pause.

"I was very wrong, Greta," she said in a low tone. "Oh! you would not think what a fearfu thing came into my mind a minute ago. Take my Ralphie. Just imagine, my own innocent baby tempted me."

As Greta reached across the bed to lift the child out of his mother's lap, the little fellow was struggling to communicate, by help of a limited vocabulary, some wondrous intelligence of recent events that somewhat overshadowed his brief existence. "Puss—dat," many times repeated, was further explained by one chubby forefinger with its diminutive finger-nail pointed to the fat back of the other hand.

"He means that the little cat has scratched him," said Greta, "but bless the mite, he is pointing to the wrong hand."

"Puss—dat," continued the child, and peered up into his mother's sightless face. Mercy was all sighs in an instant. She had borne yesterday's operation without a groan, but now the scratch on her child's hand went to her heart like a stab

"Lie quiet, Mercy," said Greta; "it will be gone to-morrow."

"Go-on," echoed the little chap, and pointed out at the window.

"The darling, how he picks up every word!" said Greta.

"He means the horse," explained Mercy.

"Go-on—man—go-on," prattled the little one, with a child's indifference to all conversation except his own.

"Bless the love, he must remember the doctor and his horse," said Greta.

Mercy was putting her lips to the scratch on the little hand.

"Oh, Greta, I am very childish; but a mother's heart melts like butter."

"Batter," echoed the child, and wriggled out of Greta's arms to the ground, where he forthwith clambered on to the stool, and possessed himself of a slice of bread which lay on the table at the bedside. Then the fair curly head disappeared like a glint of sunlight through the door to the kitchen.

"What shall I care if other mothers see my child? I shall see him too," said Mercy, and she sighed. "Yes," she added softly, "his hands and his eyes and his feet, and his soft hair."

"Try to sleep an hour or two, dear," said Greta, "and then perhaps you may get up this afternoon—only *perhaps*, you know, but we'll see."

"Yes, Greta, yes. How kind you are."

"You will be kinder to me some day," said Greta very tenderly.

"How very selfish I am. But then it is so hard not to be selfish when you are a mother. Only fancy, I never think of myself as Mercy now. No, never. I'm just Ralphie's mamma. When Ralphie came, Mercy must have died in some way. That's very silly, isn't it? Only it does seem true."

"Man—go-on—batter," was heard from the kitchen, mingled with the patter of tiny feet.

"Listen to him. How tricksome he is! And you should hear him cry 'Oh!' You would say, 'That child has had an eye knocked out.' And then, in a minute, behold he is laughing once more. There, I'm selfish again; but I will make up for it some day, if God is good."

"Yes, Mercy, He *is* good," said Greta.

Her arm rested on the door-jamb, and her head dropped on to it; her eyes swam. Did it seem at that moment as if God had been very good to these two women?

"Greta," said Mercy, and her voice fell to a whisper, "do you think Ralphie is like—anybody?"

"Yes, dear, he is like you."

There was a pause. Then Mercy's hand strayed from under the bedclothes and plucked at Greta's gown.

"Do you think," she asked, in a voice all but inaudible, "that father knows who it is?"

"I cannot say—*we* have never told him."

"Nor I—he never asked, never once—only, you know, he gave up his work at the mine, and went back to the charcoal-pit when Ralphie came. But he never said a word.'

Greta did not answer. At that moment the bedroom door was pushed open with a little lordly bang, and the great wee man entered with his piece of bread insecurely on one prong of a fork.

"Toas," he explained complacently, "toas," and walked up to the empty grate and stretched his arm over the fender at the cold bars.

"Why, there's no fire for toast, you darling goose," said Greta, catching him in her arms, much to his masculine vexation.

Mercy had risen on an elbow, and her face was full of the yearning of the blind. Then she lay back.

"Never mind," she said to herself in a faltering voice, "let me lie quiet and *think* of all his pretty ways."

IV

GRETA returned home towards noon, laughing and crying a little to herself as she walked, for she was full of a dear delicious envy. She was thinking that she could take all the shame and all the pain for all the joy of Mercy's motherhood.

God had given Greta no children.

Hugh Ritson came in to their early dinner and she told him how things went at the cottage of the old Laird Fisher. Only once before had she mentioned Mercy or the child, and he looked confused and awkward. After the meal was over he tried to say something which had been on his mind for weeks.

"But if anything should happen after all," he began, "and Mercy should not recover—or if she should ever want to go anywhere—might we not take—would you mind, Greta—I mean it might even help her—you see," he said, breaking down utterly, "there is the child, it's a sort of duty, you know—and then a good home and upbringing——"

"Don't tempt me," said Greta. "Haven't I thought of it a hundred times!"

About five o'clock the same evening a knock came to the door, and old Laird Fisher entered. His manner was more than usually solemn and constrained.

"I's coom't to say as ma lass's wee thing is taken badly," he said, "and rayder sudden't."

Greta rose from her seat and put on her hat and cloak. She was hastening down the road while the charcoal-burner was still standing in the middle of the floor.

When Greta reached the old charcoal-burner's cottage, the little one was lying in a drowsy state in Mercy's arms. Its breathing seemed difficult; sometimes it started in terror; it was feverish and suffered thirst. The mother's wistful face was bent down on it with an indescribable expression. There were only the trembling lips to tell of the sharp struggle that was going on within. But the yearning for a sight of the little flushed countenance, the tearless appeal for but one glimpse of the drowsy little eyes, the half-articulate cry of a mother's heart against the fate that made the child she had suckled at her breast a stranger, whose very features she might not know—all this was written in that blind face.

"Is he pale?" said Mercy. "Is he sleeping? He does not talk now, but only starts and cries, and sometimes coughs."

"When did this begin?" asked Greta.

"Towards four o'clock. He had been playing, and I noticed that he breathed heavily, and

then he came to me to be nursed. Is he awake now? Listen."

The little one in its restless drowsiness was muttering faintly, "Man—go-on—batter—toas."

"The darling is talking in his sleep, isn't he?" said Mercy.

Then there was a ringing, brassy cough.

"It is croup," thought Greta, and she sent for a doctor.

She closed the window, lit a fire, placed the kettle so that the steam might enter the room, then wrung flannels out of hot water, and wrapped them about the child's neck. She stayed all that night at the cottage, and sat up with the little one and nursed it. Mercy could not be persuaded to go to bed, but she was very quiet. It had not yet taken hold of her that the child was seriously ill. He was drowsy and a little feverish, his pulse beat fast and he coughed hard sometimes, but he would be better in the morning. Oh yes, he would soon be well again, and tearing up the flowers in the garden.

Towards midnight the pulse fell rapidly, the breathing became quieter, and the whole nature seemed to sink. Mercy listened with her ear bent down at the child's mouth, and a smile of ineffable joy spread itself over her face.

"Bless him, he is sleeping so calmly," she said.

Greta did not answer.

"The 'puss' and the 'man' don't darken

his little life so much now," continued Mercy, cheerily.

"No, dear," said Greta, in as strong a voice as she could summon.

"All will be well with my darling boy soon, will it not?"

"Yes, dear," said Greta, with a struggle. The blind mother could not read the other answer in her face.

Mercy had put her sensitive fingers on the child's nose, and was touching him lightly about the mouth.

"Greta," she said in a startled whisper, "does he look pinched?"

"A little," said Greta quietly.

"And his skin—is it cold and clammy?"

"We must give him another hot flannel," said Greta.

Mercy sat at the bedside, and said nothing for an hour. Then all at once, and in a strange harsh voice, she said:

"I wish God had not made Ralphie so winsome."

Greta started at the words, but gave no answer.

The daylight came early. As the leaden face of the dawn looked in at the window, Greta turned to where Mercy sat in silence. It was a sad face, too, that she saw in the mingled yellow light of the dying lamp and the grey of early morning.

Mercy spoke again.

"Greta, do you remember what Mistress Branthet said when her baby died last back-end gone twelvemonth?"

Greta looked up quickly at the bandaged eyes.

"What?" she asked.

"Well, Parson Christian tried to comfort her, and said, 'Your baby is now an angel in Paradise,' and she turned on him with 'Shaf on your angels—I want none on 'em—I want my little barn.'"

Mercy's voice broke into a sob.

Towards ten o'clock the doctor came. He had been detained. Very sorry to disoblige Mrs. Ritson, but fact was old Mr. de Broadthwaite had an attack of lumbago, complicated by a bout of toothache, and everybody knew he was most exacting. Young person's baby ill? Feverish, restless, starts in its sleep, and cough?—Ah, croupy cough—yes, croup, true croup, not spasmodic. Let him see, how old? A year and a half? Ah, bad, very. Most frequent in second year of infancy. Dangerous, highly so. Forms a membrane that occludes air passages. Often ends in convulsions, and child suffocates. Sad, very. Let him see again. How long since the attack began? Yesterday at four. Ah, far gone, far. The great man soon vanished, leaving behind him a harmless preparation of aconite and ipecacuanha.

Mercy had heard all, and her pent-up grief broke out in sobs.

"Oh, to think I shall hear my Ralphie no more, and to know his white cold face is looking up from a coffin, while other children are playing in the sunshine and chasing the butterflies! No, no, it cannot be; God will not let it come to pass; I will pray to Him and He will save my child. Why, He can do anything, and He has all the world. What is my little baby boy to Him? He will not let it be taken from me."

Greta's heart was too full for speech. But she might weep in silence, and none there would know. Mercy stretched across the bed, and, tenderly folding the child in her arms, she lifted him up, and then went down on her knees.

"Merciful Father," she said in a childish voice of sweet confidence, "this is my baby, my Ralphie, and I love him so dearly. You would never think how much I love him. But he is ill, and doctor says he may die. Oh, dear Father, only think what it would be to say, 'His little face is gone.' And then I have never seen him. You will not take him away until his mother sees him. So soon, too. Only five days more. Why, it is quite close. Not to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the next, but the day after that."

She put in many another childlike plea, and then rose with a smile on her pale lips and replaced the little one on his pillow.

"How patient he is," she said. "He can't say 'Thank you,' but I'm sure his eyes are

speaking. Let me feel." She put her finger lightly on the child's lids. "No, they are shut; he must be sleeping. Oh, dear, he sleeps very much. Is he gaining colour? How quiet he is. If he would only say, 'Mamma!' How I wish I could see him!"

She was very quiet for a while, and then plucked at Greta's gown suddenly.

"Greta," she said, eagerly, "something tells me that if I could only see Ralphie I should save him."

Greta started up in terror. "No, no, no; you must not think of it," she said.

"But something whispered it. It must have been God Himself. You know we ought to obey God always."

"Mercy, it was not God who said that. It was your own heart. You must not heed it."

"I'm sure it was God," said Mercy. "And I heard it quite plain."

"Mercy, my darling, think what you are saying. Think what it is you wish to do. If you do it you will be blind for ever."

"But I shall have saved my Ralphie."

"No, no; you will not."

"Will he not be saved, Greta?"

"Only our heavenly Father knows."

"Well, He whispered it in my heart. And, as you say, He knows best."

The day wore slowly on, and the child sank and sank. At evening the old charcoal-burner returned, and went into the bedroom. He

stood a moment and looked down at the pinched little face, and when the child's eyes opened drowsily for a moment he put his withered forefinger into its palm; but there was no longer a responsive clasp of the chubby hand.

The old man's lips quivered behind his white beard.

"It were a winsome wee thing," he said faintly, and then turned away.

He left his supper untouched, and went into the porch. There he sat on a bench and whittled a blackthorn stick. The sun was sinking over the head of the Eel Crag; the valley lay deep in a purple haze; only the bald top of Cat Bells stood out bright in the glory of the passing day. A gentle breeze came up from the south, and the young corn chattered with its multitudinous tongues in the field below. The dog lay at the charcoal-burner's feet, blinking in the sun and snapping lazily at a buzzing fly.

The little life within was ebbing away. No longer racked by the ringing cough, the loud breathing became less frequent and more harsh. Mercy lifted the child from the bed, and sat with it before the fire. Greta saw its eyes open, and at the same moment she saw the lips move slightly, but she heard nothing.

"He is calling his mamma," said Mercy, with her ear bent towards the child's mouth.

There was a silence for a long time. Mercy pressed the child to her breast; its close presence seemed to soothe her.

Greta stood and looked down ; she saw the little lips move once more, but again she heard no sound.

"He is calling his mamma," repeated Mercy wistfully, "and oh, he seems such a long way off."

Once again the little lips moved.

"He is calling me," said Mercy, listening intently ; and she grew restless and excited. "He is going away. I can hear him. He is far off. Ralphie, Ralphie!" She had lifted the child up to her face. "Ralphie, Ralphie!" she cried.

"Give me the baby, Mercy," said Greta.

But the mother clung to it with a convulsive grasp.

"Ralphie, Ralphie, Ralphie . . ."

There was a sudden flash of some white thing. In an instant the bandage had fallen from Mercy's head, and she was peering down into the child's face with wild eyes.

"Ralphie, Ralphie! . . . *Hugh!*" she cried.

The mother had seen her babe at last, and in that instant she had recognised the features of its father.

At the next moment the angel of God passed through that troubled house, and the child lay dead at the mother's breast.

Mercy saw it all, and her impassioned mood left her. She rose to her feet quietly, and laid the little one in the bed. There was never a

sigh more, never a tear. Only her face was ashy pale, and her whitening lips quivered.

"Greta," she said, very slowly, "good-bye! All is over now."

She spoke of herself as if her days were already ended and past; as if her own orb of life had been rounded by the brief span of the little existence that lay finished on the bed.

"When they come in the morning early—very early—and find us here, my boy and me, don't let them take him away from me, Greta. We should go together—yes, both together; that's only right, with Ralphie at my bosom."

The bandage lay at her feet. Her eyes were very red and heavy. Their dim light seemed to come from far away.

"Only think," she said, and her voice softened, "my Ralphie is in heaven."

Then she hid her face in her hands, and cried out loud, "But I prayed to God that I might see my child on earth. Oh, how I prayed! And God heard my prayer and answered it—but see! *I saw him die.*"

THE END.

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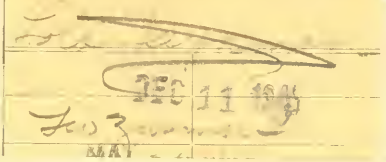

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